

2023: THE ULTIMATE PREVIEW ⚡
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METAL HAMMER

VILLE VALO

- *LIFE AFTER HIM* -

SLAYER

KERRY KING:
"MY LIVELIHOOD
WAS TAKEN AWAY"

IN FLAMES

INSIDE THEIR
SURPRISE RETURN
TO MELODEATH

MACHINE HEAD

HAND GRENADES!
DEATH THREATS!
DIRTY DISHES?

EPICA

SIMONE SIMONS
ON CORPSEPAINT
AND SPAGHETTI

SOULFLY

MAX CAVALERA:
"WE KIDNAPPED
COREY TAYLOR"

JUDAS PRIEST • POLYPHIA
KATATONIA • IMMORTAL
SLAUGHTER TO PREVAIL



IN THIS MOMENT • SABATON
BURY TOMORROW • KORN
TESSERACT • BACKXWASH

IRON MAIDEN

SALUTING THE UK ROCK LEGENDS
AND THEIR ICONIC MASCOT EDDIE





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Email enquiries help@magazinesdirect.com
 UK orderline & enquiries **0330 333 1113**
 Overseas order line and enquiries **+44 330 333 1113**
 Online orders & enquiries www.magazinesdirect.com
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Subscription delays

We rely on various delivery companies to get *Hammer* to you, many of whom continue to be impacted by Covid. We kindly ask that you allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery to help@magazinesdirect.com

Circulation

Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

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Head of Production **Mark Constance**
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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

ISSN 0955-1190

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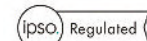
Metal Hammer (ISSN 0955-1190) January, Issue 370, is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK

The US annual subscription price is \$194.87 Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

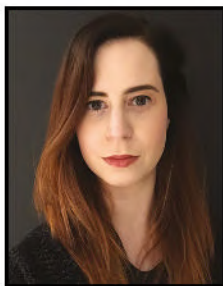
Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Metal Hammer, World Container Inc, c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA

Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
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TO DIE IS TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE ALIVE

IT'S BEEN FIVE years since we put Ville Valo on the cover in a coffin to symbolise the end of HIM, the adored goth-metal band that had been his life's work. Following something of an identity crisis, he's resurrected - a changed man, with a new heartagram, and a brand new solo album that's perfect for a moody winter. But, as former *Hammer* editor and official Ville Valo correspondent Alexander Milas discovers on p.36, Ville still has the same love of Sabbath and Depeche Mode, the same passion for epic literature, and the same dry wit. It's great to have him back.

Also... Happy New Year! With party poppers popped and fireworks fireworked, there's a ton to get excited about in the next 12 months. From the return of heavyweights such as Metallica, Avenged Sevenfold, Babymetal and Judas Priest, to a slew of releases from all corners of the metalverse, to Download's bumper four-day anniversary weekend, we're already marking our calendar and readying our ears. Finish up your selection boxes (oh, wait, ours is empty already...) and hold on tight, because 2023 is going to be a big one. We can't wait to share it with you.

Stay metal,



ELEANOR GOODMAN
 EDITOR
[@ELEANORGODMAN](https://twitter.com/ELEANORGODMAN)

MEET THE BAND



LOUISE BROCK
 ART EDITOR

Consistently brilliant Art Ed Louise oversaw our big Ville Valo photoshoot. We might have got in trouble with security for using a smoke machine, but rest assured: no goths were harmed in the making of this issue!



JAKE OWENS
 PHOTOGRAPHER

Jake is a 10/10 photographer, but he has two weaknesses: he's scared of moths and dolls. Luckily, there aren't any in these pages. We sent him along to shoot Swedish melodeath legends In Flames in London (see p.62).



HOLLY WRIGHT
 WRITER

Gig warrior, and lover of craft beers and Mexican food, Holly's chief superpower is being able to withstand the huge doses of outright absurdity we throw at her on a regular basis. This month, we sent her to watch Powerwolf (p.101).

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THE BIG PICTURE

FULL OF WOE

'TIM BURTON DIRECTS *The Addams Family*' is such a no-brainer that we're amazed it took this long for something to materialise. Like many fans who flocked to Netflix for TV show *Wednesday*, we were delighted to see his take ticked all the necessary boxes for gothic magic. With a stellar cast of Catherine Zeta-Jones as Morticia, Luis Guzmán as Gomez, Fred Armisen as Uncle Fester and rising star Jenna Ortega in the titular role of Wednesday Addams, Burton crafted an engaging murder-mystery-type series set in a Hogwarts-like private school for 'outcasts' called Nevermore Academy. Additional cast members included Gwendoline Christie (as principal Larissa Weems) and Christina Ricci (who played Wednesday in the 90s movies, as teacher Marilyn Thornhill).

The show was a massive hit, challenging other Netflix behemoths *Stranger Things* and *Squid Game* for record viewership. It went viral for an excellent dance scene partly inspired by goth icon Siouxsie Sioux and soundtracked by The Cramps' Goo Goo Muck, and even snuck a cello-led *Nothing Else Matters* into the soundtrack. *Stranger Things*' Eddie Munson might have galvanised the metalhead audience in 2022, but *Wednesday* was one for the goths. And while we haven't had confirmation of a second series yet, the numbers indicate there's plenty of demand. **H**





THE HOT TOPIC

HEAVY METAL SAVES LIVES

New German documentary series *Heavy Metal Saved My Life* explores the life-changing impact metal has on its fans

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

AS WE ALL know, the cathartic, healing and inspirational power of music is as essential to a happy and fulfilling life as oxygen, food and water. Now German public TV network ARD has made a documentary series detailing just how important heavy metal can be in making a positive impact in the lives of people across the globe. Titled *Heavy Metal Saved My Life*, the docuseries makes for hugely inspiring and essential viewing, the narratives as diverse as metal's countless subgenres.

In the first episode, German metal fan Andy details how Iron Maiden's *Fear Of The Dark* soundtracked his struggle to overcome heroin addiction after his life spiralled out of control, while Mexican Maiden fan Zyanya shares how Maiden's music helped empower her, inspiring her to take up drums and use music to pull herself from depression after being sexually assaulted at an early age. These stories are intercut with an interview with Bruce Dickinson, who succinctly sums up his relationship with fans, saying

“METAL PROVIDES LOVE, FRIENDSHIP AND CAMARADERIE”

BRANN DAILOR

“fans are to Iron Maiden what blood is to the body – they are what drive it”. The second episode explores how metal intersects with the LGBTQ+ community, with guests including Rob Halford, Faith No More's Roddy Bottum and Gaahl discussing their experiences coming out, while trans metal fan Rick shares how metal offered him a sense of belonging he hasn't found elsewhere.

These are inspirational stories, and in every case, the speaker credits heavy metal as the catalyst for changing their life. It's a frequently moving watch, reflecting the passion and drive of metal fans and musicians around the globe. Among the musicians featured is Mastodon drummer Brann Dailor, who highlights just how much work went into creating the series.

“The first thing I knew was that there was a film crew that wanted to fly to Atlanta and film us,” Brann tells us of how he got involved. “They wanted to follow up by flying out to see us in Mexico, so we knew they were really committed to this project.”

By putting the focus purely on the stories of the musicians and fans involved, *Heavy Metal Saved My Life* offers an intimate look at the metal community, allowing subjects to open up and discuss exactly how metal has helped them through the often-



Mastodon's Brann Dailor shares his experiences in the series

desperate situation they have found themselves in. For Brann, the story of Mastodon's 2009 masterpiece *Crack The Sky*, a tribute to his sister who passed away at the age of 14, has been fairly well-documented. But to see such a candid selection of interviews from the drummer, talking about his life and what he went through to make that landmark record, will almost certainly bring a lump to your throat.

“In these sorts of situations, you want to open up,” says Brann of his contribution to the documentary. “The interviews are like therapy sessions in a lot of ways. You can talk through these things you poured into your music, and the things that inspired that music. You can kinda comb over them and make sense of them. It helps to talk about those things that made a big part in what helped create that music.”



In episode one, it's all brilliantly tied together as Zyanya, who finds catharsis through playing drums in her own band, experiences Mastodon for the first time as they support Iron Maiden in Mexico, and singles out Brann in particular as an inspiration.

"It's cool," smiles Brann. "That's the thing with heavy metal drumming. You can find that energy to work out all these feelings so they don't get taken out on someone else! If there is some kind of anger that crops up then it can be worked out on the drums. It's cool, that was a great moment."

Seeing heavy metal being represented in such a wholesome way is a welcome rarity in a world where metalheads are still often so deeply misunderstood, the series cleverly drilling down to the core passion at the heart of metal fandom.

"From a fan perspective, it's been there my whole life," Brann tells us.

"There are more passionate fans in metal than... well, I don't want to belittle other types of music, but the fandom is extreme and it's lifelong. If you find a band you love, you're there to the end. It becomes a part of your identity, your tribe. A lot of metal fans feel like misfits, like they're ostracised from society, and we come together through that. It's important to give these people self-worth and not feel like they're alone, metal provides that: love, friendship and camaraderie. To unite."

It most certainly does, and if you want to see that ethos succinctly and movingly play out in front of your eyes, then *Heavy Metal Saved My Life* is a show that you need to seek out immediately. **H**

WATCH HEAVY METAL SAVED MY LIFE ONLINE NOW AT WWW.ARDmediathek.de

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

EVANESCENCE'S *FALLEN* HAS SOLD MORE THAN 10 MILLION COPIES

And that's just in the United States. The RIAA awarded their 2003 debut Diamond status on November 30.

SOME GENIUS HAS MADE A MASH-UP OF TURNSTILE AND *FAMILY GUY*

The riff from *Holiday* meets *Peanut Butter Jelly Time*. We won't lie, we love it.

MÖTLEY CRÜE WERE 2022'S BIGGEST SUCCESS STORY IN ROCK

...according to a report by ticket marketplace Vivid Seats. Turns out playing sold-out stadiums is a big deal.



BATS ARE METAL AF

Move over, goths; scientists found out bats use their larynx in the same way as death metal vocalists.

GUNS N' ROSES ARE SUING A TEXAS GUNSTORE

...called Guns And Roses, naturally.

CONVERGE AND HEILUNG ARE HEADLINING ARCTANT

The festival takes place during 16-19 August at Somerset's Fernhill Farm.

EX-EVERY TIME I DIE MEMBERS ARE RECORDING... SOMETHING

Ex-members of ETID have been busy teasing new studio material for 2023 on Instagram.

...AND THEY'RE NOT ALONE

Not to be left out, ex-ETID singer Keith Buckley has also teased a new project.

JONAS ÅKERLUND IS MAKING A MOVIE ABOUT GG ALLIN

The late musician was a notoriously controversial figure. We're excited, appalled and intrigued all at once.

VERA FARMIGA DID ANOTHER KILLER METAL COVER

The *Conjuring* star sang Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* at New York's Rock Academy and now we want her to form a band.



HOW'S YOUR CORPSEPAINT GAME?

Epica's symphonic metal siren Simone Simons faces the music about joining black metal bands, movie soundtracks and Pastafarianism

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL • PICTURES: TIM TRONCKOE

FOR 20 YEARS, Epica have been flying the flag for bombastic, extravagant symphonic metal, with the visuals and ambition to match. Their new collaborative EP, *The Alchemy Project* – featuring the likes of Myrkur, Fleshgod Apocalypse and members of Soilwork and Kamelot – is possibly their most ambitious work to date. We put your questions to singer Simone Simons on what it was like working with Uriah Heep, playing shows in Mayan ruins and that time she (almost) joined a black metal band.

Wikipedia says you joined a black metal band for a cup of coffee before you became a member of Epica.

If true, what was that band like? How was your corpsepaint game?

Matt Mills, Twitter

“Wikipedia is wrong! I never joined a black metal band. I was just there during a rehearsal, but never actually sang in the band. I went there to have a look, so it's a half-truth, I guess. They were in my hometown and my friend's boyfriend was playing in that band, so that's why we went, but I was way too shy to sing along. Epica was my true first band.”

How did the band initially meet?

Scott Thrower, Facebook

“I knew Mark [Jansen, guitars/vocals] because I was in a relationship with him back in the day. He started a new band [after leaving After Forever] pretty quickly, but because I was his girlfriend, at first I didn't want to join. I helped them search for a singer. I thought

I should do it by the book – finish high school and *then* go explore the world with a metal band. But when they asked me if I wanted to [sing for them], I thought, ‘OK, let's just give it a go.’ And here we are, 20 years later!”

Was there ever an aesthetic pressure to fit into the more gothic side of symphonic metal?

Jazmin L'Amey, email

“Not really, I've always done my own thing. I've enjoyed the visual aspect of being in the band, getting ready for the show, designing the clothes and everything like that. I've been called the metal Barbie, but I don't give a damn. It's more like a compliment than people realise! The aesthetics are a big part of our shows, photoshoots and videoshoots that people don't really think of, and it's a lot of fun to do it.”

Consign To Oblivion is one of my all-time favourite records. Have you ever

visited a Mayan ruin, and would you do a 20th-anniversary gig from one?

Jo Cristobal, email

“I think Mark did, I didn't. Playing a show from one is probably going to be a little bit tricky with electricity and everything, so... ha ha! Maybe just an acoustic song or something like that! But Mark's visited some ancient Mayan sites in Mexico – he was also the one who was interested in ancient Mayan culture and wrote lyrics about it.”

What topics would you like to explore in the future when writing new music?

Arley Rosales, Facebook

“I don't think too much about it. I just go with the spur of the moment: what's happening in my life, what's happening around the world... [2021's] *Omega* was a very spiritual album, which was also a reflection of what was happening at that time. So I guess [our new music] is just going to be a continuation of that.”

Epica albums often have a central concept or overarching narrative, like [2007's] *The Divine Conspiracy*. What's the most innocuous conspiracy theory you think might actually be true?

Dan Hillier, Facebook

“I've no idea! I've been off the religion train for a long time and unfortunately only had unpleasant experiences. I'm in no way anti-religion, though. *The Divine Conspiracy* was more about extremities within religion – the dangerous parts where they really indoctrinate people and put really weird ideas in their head. Religion can be a beautiful thing, but ▶



Epica: bringing the bombastic for 20 years

**“I’VE BEEN
CALLED THE
METAL BARBIE,
BUT I DON’T
GIVE A DAMN”**

Metal Ken just out of shot?

a lot of bloodshed has been in its name. With that album, we picked different extremities within different religions to highlight what's been going on and what's still going on. But yeah, it can be very dangerous, as we've seen lately."

Hammer: is there one outside of religion you like?

"The church of the spaghetti monster... what's that called?"

Hammer: The Church Of The Flying Spaghetti Monster.

"Yeah, I love spaghetti. So I guess I'm not allowed to enter that church. Maybe I'm the spaghetti monster! Ha ha ha!"

The Skeleton Key encapsulated all that defines Epica as EPIC! What was the idea behind the song?

Inn Ayyur, Twitter

"*Skeleton Key* was written by Rob [van der Loo, bass], and the working title of it was 'Inception'. Rob is a huge movie soundtrack fan; I am too. He showed me the song during our writing sessions for *Omega* and the lyrics written by myself are basically that everybody holds the key or the answers to the questions that you have within yourself and that you can unlock different rooms and hallways within yourself. On the one hand, that can be a good thing, but it can also be bad because you also have the power to let your demons free."

What songs from recent movie soundtracks would you play live?

Mark Sayce, email

"We've done that in the past with [2009 live album] *The Classical Conspiracy* and, funnily enough, today I was singing some Disney songs. I've done a cover of a Disney song from *The Little Mermaid* [*Part Of Your World*, released in 2021]. Maybe something else is gonna come up, you never know!"

Where did the idea to do The Alchemy Project come from?

Jac Holloway, Facebook

"The idea was from Isaac [Delahaye, guitar/backing vocals]. At the beginning of the pandemic, he had the idea of writing songs with our friends in the metal scene. We reached out to all our friends who'd be interested, and that's literally how the ball started rolling. It's cool when you have this idea and you don't know if it's gonna work, because this is a little bit outside of our

"WORKING WITH RAMMSTEIN IS ON MY BUCKET LIST"

On the lookout for flying spaghetti monsters...



comfort zone. I think a lot of people will be very surprised with some of the songs that are on this EP."

How did you get Uriah Heep on the EP?

Elliot Grimmie, email

"Epica always like to add a couple of elements of surprise. That was also part of the idea behind this EP – that we could experiment! Rob has connections to a lot of musicians that are not necessarily in the symphonic metal scene, and *Wake The World* was one of the songs we started working on when we first had the idea, but didn't really push the project through. So that song was one of the first we started with. I rewrote it to fit the vocal lines, but had the idea of what Phil [Lanzon, Uriah Heep keyboardist/co-vocalist] wanted to say in the back of my mind. It's a really cool addition having him there."

What was your favourite bit about working on The Alchemy Project?

Paul Baptist, email

"I wrote a song with Charlotte [Wessels, ex-Delain vocalist] and I had a lot more input in the composition compared to what I normally do when writing for Epica. This time, I got to direct the song and it was really nice to work with Charlotte. She's been putting out some

great work recently since she started her Patreon and I really love her solo songs. We started going through ideas that she'd accumulated and I picked the melodies that she had lying around for *Sirens – Of Blood And Water*. We worked on that for almost a year, but working together was great. I was in her studio, she was in my studio, so it was a really intense writing session for this song and I really love how it turned out."

Who is on your bucket list to collaborate with?

Lisa Aliss, Facebook

"There are a lot of artists! I really like Aurora. She's a Norwegian singer/songwriter who writes beautiful songs and has a really beautiful voice – I think we could be a good match. I would also like to work with Rammstein one day – that's on the bucket list."

Could you ever see Epica doing an arena headline tour?

Emmy Willets, email

"Maybe. I went to see Iron Maiden with Within Temptation and it was amazing. I prefer doing smaller shows because the interaction with the audience is just different and it just feels more cosy and intimate than an arena. Who knows, though. Maybe someday!"

THE ALCHEMY PROJECT IS OUT NOW VIA ATOMIC FIRE. EPICA AND APOCALYPTICA TOUR THE UK IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

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PLANET ROCK



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road crew



THE SLAYLIST

JONATHAN HULTÉN

The ex-Tribulation songwriting mastermind takes a soothing stroll down memory lane via jazz, folk and goth rock

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS

“I DISCOVERED JAMI SIEBER on the soundtrack of a videogame called *Braid*. I fell in love with that game and most of all with the song *Maenam*; it brings me peace of mind, like entering a meditative state. It’s simple in that there’s not much happening, it’s very drone-y, but that’s what I like so much about it. It feels like the doors of the heart are opening. *Sunrise* by NORA H JONES is just so warm and comforting to listen to, like being wrapped in a blanket of kindness. I am in awe of how good it is. I also connect it with fond memories of a friend I lived with when we moved to Stockholm [from Arvika in the west]. We have barely hung out since then, but this song takes me back to when we were sitting on the balcony with coffee in our hands, philosophising about life.

“I love *Hide And Seek* by IMOGEN HEAP. It’s basically a cappella, but with some kind of plugin or vocoder, and it’s the coolest thing I’ve ever heard. I found it inspiring the first time I heard it and I think I’ve unconsciously been trying to recreate those harmonies ever since. It’s dynamic, floating and moving in unexpected directions, exploring the whole spectrum of possible notes that sound cool. PJ HARVEY is an artist I’ve also been inspired by – *That Was My Veil* [with John Parish] is one of the best songs I’ve ever heard. It’s perfect songwriting. When I pick up a guitar, I start playing it, and sometimes I’ve even written songs that are too similar, because I like it so much that it just keeps coming back.

“I listen to a lot of jazz. What I like about jazz is that I don’t really know what to expect, especially with the classics. I haven’t listened to much other stuff by TORD GUSTAVSEN TRIO, but I connect *The Other Side* with friendship because

“I JAMMED ELLA FITZGERALD WITH SOME SENIOR JAZZ MUSICIANS”

Jonathan Hultén lights up when he hears PJ Harvey

LISTEN NOW

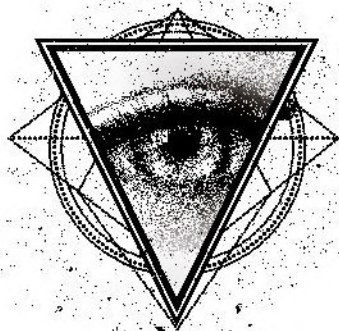
Head to tinyurl.com/HultenSlaylist

my friends and I spent an entire morning listening to this song on repeat, drinking coffee and talking for hours. ELLA FITZGERALD is an amazing singer... such a beautiful and timeless voice. I used to play *Blue Skies* with a group of senior jazz musicians. For a few months in 2010 we met each Sunday and played jazz classics, although half of the time was spent drinking coffee and eating homemade cinnamon buns. They were such good times. The person who organised these jam sessions passed away only three years later, so this song is a dear memory of those afternoons we spent together.

“A friend of mine had *In The Waiting Line* by ZERO 7 on a playlist, around the same time that we moved away from home together and went to live in Stockholm. I connect this song to what I felt back then in that first year, when I was 19 and felt like I was waiting for my life to begin. *Terra Nova* by GÖSTA BERLINGS SAGA is a dramatic song – it goes up and down, back and forth. A rollercoaster. I connect this song to a separation, and if I project my own feelings onto it, I hear a determination to go forward but also a sense of doubt. They did an incredible job of depicting that sense of discovery and the feeling that you’re on a journey. I hear myself in it somehow.

“DRAB MAJESTY are incredibly nice guys. I discovered them in 2017 when we were about to play a show together with Youth Code and the song *Cold Souls* just blew me away. You feel free when you listen to it, like the world is an amazing place and everything is possible. I just discovered *Heaven* by GRACE CUMMINGS and I’ve been listening to it over and over. An incredible voice, an incredible song, and in the same way as with Drab Majesty, something lights up, you feel inspired. The more I listen to it, the more I realise it’s one of those songs that makes you stop and look into the sky and just feel a sense of wonder. The world is such a cool place when you find music like this.” H

THE FOREST SESSIONS IS OUT NOW VIA KSCOPE



IN THE STUDIO TESSERACT

Former tech-metal overlords set their sights on going bigger, proggy and catchier than ever before

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: SARAH MAIDEN

ALMOST FIVE YEARS ago, Tesseract released *Sonder* and stepped away from the tech-metal scene that had long been their home. A broader, more instantly catchy and straightforward album, it showed a real maturity and evolution to their songwriting, opening the door to an appeal beyond the scene that spawned them. Sets at Download, Bloodstock and ArcTanGent, as well as support slots with everyone from Dream Theater to Trivium and Megadeth showed they were aiming to pull in as many new fans as possible. With a new album on the horizon, we spoke to vocalist Dan Tompkins and bassist Amos Williams about where they're going next.

Sonder was a massive leap for you guys. How much further are you going this time?

Amos: "We're way over the hill! We'll never deny our roots as a band – there's elements of where we've come from and elements of the future on this new record – but this is a whole new thing for us. The approach and the musicality might shock a few people; there's a lot of depths that we haven't explored before. We're trying to push our boundaries even further."

Dan: "It's the most dynamic album we've ever written. It's the biggest-sounding, too – some of the songs are the heaviest that we've ever written in our career. There's a tinge here and there of djent, but it's really more progressive metal. The thing that excites me the most is the really strong concept for the



Laying down the progressive rock club bangers

record, visually and lyrically, although I don't know how much we can give away or talk about at the moment!"

It sounds like quite the epic.

Dan: "Well, it's over an hour long! It ended up being a long album, not strictly by design, but because our growth and journey as a band, the evolution of our sound, really needed that. I'm excited for people to hear it." **Amos:** "I don't want anyone to think it isn't accessible. We played a new track at ArcTanGent, and people were there straight away. That gives us confidence that we've done the right thing in making it dense and multi-layered, but with an instantaneous edge. That's true of the whole album; it's a bit of a barrage, but it's fun, hooky, groovy. That's important – it's a lot of fun not just to listen to, but to play as well."

Dan: "We've found that sweet spot."

It sounds like you're writing progressive rock club bangers!

Dan: "I hope so! I mean, I'd never deny, the glory years when I was growing up and listening to Linkin Park, Korn and Slipknot are still my biggest influences." **Amos:** "So much of modern music is sport, how much you can put into something. But that then becomes insular, it becomes about the performer and not the

audience. I look forward to people not turning their head away. I want to play for the room."

What's been different about the process this time?

Dan: "It's been a true collaborative process. It's usually just myself and Acle [Kahney, founding guitarist] who write everything. This time we all contributed to it, we actually wrote some stuff in the studio and there are real drums on the record, the full album production. It's not DIY."

Last year you released the single *Regrowth*, with all proceeds going to the people of Ukraine. What inspired that?

Dan: "We genuinely wanted to help out and we had some songs that weren't going to fit on the album."

Amos: "On our last headline run, the shows ended in Ukraine, and one of the towns we played was by the Russian border, one of the first places to go [when war broke out]. It became very visceral for us, wanting to see if there was anything we could do. We'd always been supported by the fans in Ukraine – when we went there over 10 years ago for the first time, it was incredible. So we wanted to do what little we can for these people we have met and made friends with in the last decade." **H**

TESSERACT'S NEW ALBUM IS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
5

STUDIO:
Middle Farm Studios, England

PRODUCER:
Self-produced

EXPECT:
Prog metal nirvana with pop hooks throughout



LOVE HIM OR loathe him, there's no denying Robb Flynn has overcome *a lot* in his journey to the upper echelons of heavy metal. Even before the Machine Head frontman got raked over the coals for nu metal flirtation *The Burning Red*, he had endured substance abuse, violence and even death threats. So with a new line-up and 2022's *Of Kingdom And Crown* proving yet again that Machine Head are metal's most unkillable band, we thought it high time to find out just how Robb keeps triumphing over all...

APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'VE GOT
“Looking back, I feel like my dad did a good job. By all definitions we were living in a white trash neighbourhood, but he'd always tell me we were rich – rich in love, family, health... We would go on hikes and he would walk me past the trailer park he grew up in. He and his five brothers lived in a small aluminium trailer and slept on a table that folded into a bed, and didn't have a bathroom – they'd shit in buckets they'd then have to empty out a quarter-mile away.”

YOU HAVE TO EARN YOUR WAY
“When I wanted to start learning guitar, my dad was like, ‘We can't afford a guitar but I'll rent this for you. And if I see you're putting the work in, I'll match 50% of whatever you earn.’ I was a busboy at a restaurant, picking up dirty dishes and whatever. His thinking was, if I wanted it, I could get it. And I really did – I was obsessed.”

THRASH WAS PRETTY MUCH LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT
“The first thrash show I went to was Exciter, the Heavy Metal Maniac tour at [San Francisco music club] The Stone. It was the first time I'd seen circle-pits, my first time seeing crowdsurfers. Me and my friend Jim just went right to the front and headbanged through the whole show. All we could talk about after was how we were gonna start a band.”

METAL AND PUNK WERE LIKE OIL AND WATER IN THE 80s
“I went to see D.R.I. before punks and metalheads got along. We pay this guy at the door to get in and this gigantic fucking skinhead walks up to the doorman and punches him in the face, sending him down, and snarls, ‘No fucking longhairs.’ When D.R.I. came on it was like a 50-minute-long fight. One dude picks up a broken bottle and sticks it in his forehead, smears the blood down his face and jumps offstage. It was terrifying, scary-as-fuck and *thrilling*. I was like, ‘I need to be part of this insanity.’”

IT WAS DO OR DIE IN THE BAY
“I wasn't in this to become successful – I just wanted to play thrash metal. Back then, thrashers were *rough*,

man – if you weren't fast or heavy you'd get strung up. They'd come up to rip your fucking amp offstage and take you out. When I was in Forbidden, we were opening for Suicidal Tendencies and they were the scariest band in existence. They'd bring 40 dudes up from Los Angeles and it would be the most violent shit you'd ever seen, dudes jumping off the PA feet-first into the crowd and breaking collarbones and shit. But it actually went OK because nobody pushed us off, so it was a success!”



LIFE LESSONS

ROBB FLYNN

Heroin overdoses, death threats, and a whole heap of dirty plates... Machine Head's fiery frontman has had a rocky road to the top

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

THINGS GOT ROUGH FOR THRASH IN THE 90s
“When I joined Vio-lence we went on a real van tour – all of our luggage and gear tied to the top of the van with rope, driving across America. By the time I left, they'd gone from playing two sold-out nights at [Oakland rock club] Omni and The Stone to playing to maybe 100 people and people were throwing silver dollars at us. I was jumping off and fighting

dudes. Like everything else, thrash was dying. I got into this fight and this gang threatened to throw grenades onstage while I played. I laugh now, but it was real and fucking scary at the time.”

TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH...
“Somewhere along the way before I started Machine Head, I started feeling like there were decisions being made [in Vio-lence] I didn't agree with, so it was like, ‘I'll make my own band because I know what I want to do.’ I started Machine Head when I was 24 and I felt like a has-been – like, ‘I'm *oilllld*’ – but I just kept pushing forwards because I love playing music. Machine Head wasn't a sure bet; we didn't even have a drummer and only had a few songs. It was a very uncertain time in my life so I just kept writing.”

TAKE A LOOK AROUND
“When Machine Head started, we were renting a rehearsal room that we shared with seven other bands. We were the only metal band – the others were all punks and they'd decorated literally every inch of the walls with classic shit from Discharge and GBH to totally unknown up-and-coming punk bands. I remember staring at those punk rock flyers all the time, and this was the time of really political punk – like the band MDC, Millions Of Dead Cops. It all seeped in unconsciously and came out in [1994 debut] *Burn My Eyes*.”

IT ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN
“On the night Machine Head signed with Roadrunner Records, I OD'd on heroin. A really good friend of mine OD'd on the same batch of bad heroin and he died. A couple days later I'm at his funeral and I'm like, ‘That could have been me.’ It shook me to my core. It was like, ‘What the fuck am I doing?’ Because if things had turned out differently, there'd have been no *Burn My Eyes*, no *Davidian*, no nothing.”

DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF
“I genuinely love old-school hip hop. Even back then, alongside the hardcore shows, I was going to see N.W.A, LL Cool J and Ice Cube. I saw Public Enemy so many times and I love that group to this day. Bands like Biohazard were a big influence on us because they took hip hop and mixed it with hardcore, long before anyone else was doing it. [Biohazard guitarist] Bobby Hambel was the Slash of hardcore – the coolest motherfucker you ever saw.”

DON'T BELIEVE THE CRITICS
“*The Burning Red* didn't sell half-a-million copies because people hated it. There were

a lot of motherfuckers lying about not getting that record. I was throwing Method Man raps into *A Thousand Lies* on the *Burn My Eyes* tour; we were covering *Colors* by ▶

“ONE DUDE PICKED UP A BROKEN BOTTLE AND STUCK IT IN HIS FOREHEAD”

ROBB FLYNN

Nobody gets to push
The General off a stage





“THIS GANG THREATENED TO THROW GRENADES ONSTAGE WHILE I PLAYED”

Ice-T, but suddenly people were saying we ‘got into hip hop’ on *The Burning Red*. The *Davidian* video is a rap video, we’re walking down the streets with pitbulls, for Christ’s sake! I never understood that criticism, but I think those *Burning Red* songs stood the test of time. Our mistake was making that video – it was corny as fuck!”

BE AMBITIOUS

“[2005 collaboration project] Roadrunner United was so fun and exciting. One of my greatest strengths as a songwriter is taking all these disparate ideas and turning them into something, so getting to work with so many diverse artists and styles was crazy. It was wild – I went for the big names like Corey Taylor and Howard Jones from Killswitch, and they were like, ‘Fuck yeah, we wanna work with Robb!’ Playing *The Dagger* at Bloodstock was incredible – we’ve never played it live before.”

NOTHING IS A SURE THING

“If you look back at interviews for *The Blackening*, I was so uncertain if people were gonna like it. We had four 10-minute songs and that was a real risk for us. It was so anti-war too, I had to pull the guys aside and say, ‘Look, I’m gonna start some shit with this, there’s gonna be consequences and backlash.’ There *were* consequences, too – we got banned from venues, banned from Disney property for a decade and that cost us a shit-ton of money. But that was what I had to say, and what I had to do.”

ADAPT OR DIE

“Modern technology has really changed how we approach songwriting. Something like [2020 standalone single] *Stop The Bleeding* I wouldn’t ever put on an album, but it’s a great song. Putting that out as a standalone single meant fans could digest it and we didn’t have the pressure of, ‘Well, we have this many songs for this album, but these ones don’t go.’ Having Spotify and digital releases is awesome. I really enjoy it.”

DON’T ASK ME

“At one point, people were asking for my opinion on this thing or that thing, but I don’t agree with that. I’m a musician who writes songs; who gives a fuck what I think? I’m just some fucking dude who writes songs. I’m just trying to figure this whole thing out myself – and I *still* haven’t figured it out. I used to deal drugs and got up to all kinds of criminal behaviour, so don’t put me on a pedestal.” **H**

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PROG

HAWKWIND

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"People came to have their minds ripped apart."

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MAGMA
French legends revamped and revitalised on Kärtéhl

ALAN PARSONS PROJECT
"It was punk or prog. And obviously we went with prog!"

HORSLIPS
50 years of prog from the Emerald Isle



THE STORY BEHIND

JUMPDAFUCKUP SOULFLY

The pressure was on for Soulfly to match their groundbreaking debut. With help from their friends – including rising star Corey Taylor – they surpassed it

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

WHEN MAX CAVALERA

abruptly left Sepultura – the band he'd formed in 1984 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil – during their 1996 Roots tour, it was one of the biggest scandals in metal. Sepultura had become global superstars and looked poised to stamp their own unique imprint on the burgeoning nu metal movement, but the singer walked out after a sold-out show at London's Brixton Academy, much to their fans' surprise. To Max's credit, he hadn't even got off the plane home before he set plans in motion for Soulfly, and in 1998 his new band released one of the best debut records of the 90s with their self-titled effort.

Getting the thumbs-up from critics and fans alike, *Soulfly* proved that Max had something of a metal Midas touch. But if *Soulfly* represented a glorious comeback, then the pressure of following it up loomed large.

"You can't keep doing the same thing," Max tells us today. "You gotta find ways of making new records as exciting as they can be."

After the success of *Soulfly*, Max sought out other ways to keep his band fresh. His solution this time was to scour the scene to find other big-name artists from metal and beyond to lend their voice alongside his. It was this search that led him to plucking an up-and-coming musician from the backwoods of Iowa and bringing him into the studio to write one of the most enduring songs of his career. This is the wild, magical story of *Jumpdafuckup*.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2000

ALBUM:
Primitive

PERSONNEL:

Max Cavalera (vocals), Corey Taylor (vocals), Mikey Doling (guitar), Marcelo D. Rapp (bass/percussion), Joe Nunez (drums), Toby Wright (keyboards), Larry McDonald (percussion), Meia Noite (percussion)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
N/A



"*Primitive* is a strange album," says Max of Soulfly's second effort. "It's an idea that was pretty much borrowed from hip hop. A lot of 90s hip hop had a lot of guests and I thought, 'Why can't we do that with metal? That would be cool!' That was the main idea of *Primitive*, it was a fearless record. You have Sean Lennon and Tom Araya on the same record, Slayer and the Beatles! How do you even connect them? Then you have a heavy song like *Jumpdafuckup*."

After settling on the decision to make their new album a jam-and-collaboration-heavy affair, Max roped in the aforementioned Slayer frontman and Beatles offspring alongside Deftones' Chino Moreno, Will Haven's Grady Avenell and, for the album's definitive piece, Corey Taylor. At that point, Corey was still a new (and as-yet-unrevealed) face in the metal scene, Slipknot's groundbreaking 1999 debut – and incendiary performances on that year's Ozzfest – having only recently thrust his band into the spotlight. Max remembers his first exposure to Slipknot with fondness.

"A friend of mine, Joey, was good friends with Paul [Gray, late Slipknot bassist]," Max tells us. "He showed me *Wait And Bleed*, and I loved that first record, it was phenomenal. They were on tour and had a date in Phoenix, so Joey brought Paul to my house and Paul confessed that he was a member of the Sepultura fanclub, the Nomadic Warriors. He had the card with him

in his wallet, pulled it out and showed me. That was fucking cool, man. It was a moment."

Max decided to reach out to Corey to ask him to guest on a song on *Primitive*. Corey, a huge Sepultura and Soulfly fan, didn't need any convincing.

"*Jumpdafuckup* came out of nowhere," Corey tells us. "Max's people hit me up, like, 'Do you wanna do a song with Max?' Of course I do! What are you, fucking nuts?"

Corey was in, but little did he know that Max had been wrestling with the song while trying to get it right.

"I struggled with that opening riff for about five hours in the studio," laughs Max. "I was getting mad at my guitar, flipping it off, calling it names. I kept fucking with it. It's a simple riff but I wasn't getting it, so I smashed the guitar to pieces. Really rock'n'roll! So, I went outside, cleared my head. When I came back in and grabbed another guitar, the first time I played the riff, it came out. It came from the sky, a light came down. It was incredible! That gave birth to the whole song."

With the music finished, it was time to get Corey in to perform his part. It's here, on a day that Max describes as a "saga," that the story of *Jumpdafuckup* gets really outrageous.





Max Cavalera: jumping da fuck up, and fucking shit up

"Corey was playing in Arizona the week we were in the studio," Max recalls excitedly. "We already had the song, all the music was recorded, so me and my friend drove to the venue, and they're just about to soundcheck and I shout, 'Hey Corey, what's up! We have to go to the studio and record!' We pretty much kidnapped him! 'Fuck your sound-check!' We put him in this piece-of-shit car in the desert."

"I went down to the studio, and [producer] Toby Wright's there, Max is there, it was almost kismet," Corey says. "They basically gave me a blank cheque on the verses."

"He went in blind," hoots Max. "And he picked all the right spots! How crazy is that?! He wrote all those lyrics in the chair! That's magic, man. That's like witnessing insanity."

With the song now fully written, the two icons of metal went into the vocal booth and created a landmark moment.

"Corey loves the song and he's going apeshit," grins Max. "He's killing it, too, those verses are amazing. I love

"WE KIDNAPPED COREY TAYLOR IN A SHIT CAR"

MAX CAVALERA

that whole ending, it's one of the hardest things ever. We were listening back, jumping, headbanging."

"We got round the mic and sang it together," Corey says. "Dude, it was one of the best experiences of my life! It was my first real taste of doing

something with a peer... Well, not even a peer, but a hero! It was fucking Max Cavalera! I'd kind of blown my voice out singing in the studio and had barely anything left for the show, but it was one of the best days of my life."

It's a sentiment shared by Max, who left the studio and went back to the venue to watch Slipknot that evening.

"An amazing day of recording, then I see Slipknot the same night," he smiles at the memory. "I'm headbanging, I've got my kids with me, my wife, they put me on this private balcony. If you've seen [1984 movie] *Amadeus*, you'll remember that part where he goes to see his friend playing and he is on the balcony partying – I felt like that. I dunno, there's a connection there somewhere. It was one of the best days of my life – such a metal day."

The only problem that arose was that Soulfly wanted to include a picture of every collaborator in the liner notes of the album. But Corey's image was ►

Cello Dias, aka Marcelo D. Rapp, handled bass duties on the first three Soulfly albums

“WE WERE LIKE THE WU-TANG CLAN OF METAL”

MAX CAVALERA

still very much under protection at that time.

“Back then, no one knew what Corey looked like because they were still just wearing the masks,” chuckles Max. “So we used a picture of Corey’s back – you can see the tattoo on his neck.”

Primitive was released on September 26, 2000, entering the US Billboard Top 200 at No.32, which remains Soulfly’s highest position. Much of its success was thanks to the crushing, careering grooves and furious tag-teaming vocals between Max and Corey on *Jumpdafuckup*. It probably didn’t hurt that there was a big dollop of melody in there as well.

“It’s Soulfly flirting with Tool a little bit,” Max says. “I think if you listen to the verses, especially Corey’s, there are very Tool basslines and percussion. I think it comes a little bit from that.”

At the turn of the millennium, Soulfly also toured with a bunch of heavy hitters: Rammstein, Pantera, Slayer, Morbid Angel, In Flames, and even Skunk Anansie. “It would never happen now!” Max laughs.

Over the last two decades, Soulfly have frequently changed styles, experimenting with death, thrash and groove metal. Last year’s *Totem* proves that Max is still finding new ways of making music exciting, emboldened by the success of that second Soulfly record. *Jumpdafuckup* remains one of their definitive anthems and their most listened-to song on streaming services, with more than 31 million streams on Spotify alone.

“I love that it’s one of our biggest-selling records,” Max tells us. “It was the idea, the jam idea... we were like the Wu-Tang Clan of metal.”

As for why *Jumpdafuckup* has continued to connect so many years after its birth, Max believes the story behind the creation of the song has given it a sort of magic that can still be heard all these years later.

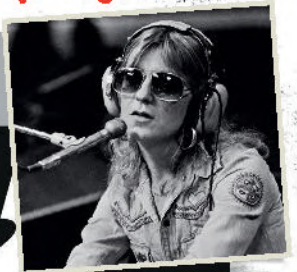
“That’s maybe why it’s one of our biggest songs,” he muses. “All this stuff went into the making of the song, it’s like a whole soap opera. That’s what life is about – experience as much as you can. I love that I could be part of all these different scenes. It made me a better person.” ■

TOTEM IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

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THIN LIZZY

WAS IT 'FIXED' IN THE STUDIO?
THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH

By Scott Gorham & Brian Robertson





YOUR SHOUT

MIGHT AS WELL PUT SPICE GIRLS ON THE COVER

...and other bizarre accusations, words of praise and condemnations you had to offer on our massive end-of-year issue.

BLEGH FRIDAY

Bring Me The Horizon for Download? AMAZING news. Hopefully Architects will be that day too – I want a blegh! overload from two of this country's best bands. It's good to see Download moving away from all the old man music and actually booking up-and-coming acts again!

Hayley Yeomans, email

Yep, Bring Me have certainly earned their spot at Download, Hayley, and if our recent interview with Architects' Sam Carter is anything to go by, maybe we could even see a team-up onstage. Not sure we back the old man bashing, though – Metallica may be a bit long in the tooth now but look how incredible they still are!

HU KHAN DO IT

Brilliant feature on The Hu in the new *Metal Hammer* – that band are seriously inspiring. I worried a little when the new album didn't really get the viral hype that their first did, but I saw them on tour and the room was packed. Hu! Hu! Hu!

Leanne Eccles, email

Thanks Leanne! Yep, The Hu have still got some serious momentum behind them, their December UK tour proving just



Ghost: game-changers

how much people love that band. Long may it continue!

GIVING THANKS

Just finished reading the tragic story of Papo Delgado and the frikis [MHR368]. It just saddened me beyond belief. It's so tragic the lengths that people are prepared to go through to try and live their lives. Makes you realise just how fortunate we are in so many respects. Sure, we have all the usual bollocks that are 'first world problems' but when you read about what's happening elsewhere it's hard not to feel grateful.

Darrell Moreira, email

Absolutely Darrell, it highlights just what is important and puts everything else into perspective.

GHOSTBUSTER

A great year for metal with great albums and you have to go ruin it with Ghost and Babymetal. Are you for real?

António Pereirinha de Moraes, Facebook

Ah yes Antonio, why would we talk about two of metal's biggest breakout successes of the past decade? The mind boggles.

IMPERA TRIUMPHANT

I love how this year was the year of Ghost. They deserve it so much.

PumpkinPeasyyy, Twitter

They definitely do! Not only did Ghost release an album that was positively stacked with bangers (hello, *Impera*), they made serious inroads into the mainstream via TikTok, grabbed a Grammy nomination and put on an incredible, theatrical arena tour. It's fair to say this really is game-changing stuff.

VIVA FOR-NEVER

Ghost as the album of the year? Surprise, surprise... Might as well put the Spice Girls on the cover of your magazine.

Ray Garver, Facebook

Only if that's what you want, what you really, really want, Ray.

#TWEETS

Getting press updates is entertaining when you hear you're too bleak for certain metal publications. O...Kay? We're talking about metal here, right?

KEN Mode
(@kenmodeofficial)

3 toilets in the house but I go outside to pee. Holler.

Mark Morton, Lamb Of God
(@MarkDuaneMorton)

If you think I'm a miserable cunt you should meet the guy that just fixed my washing machine!

Nick Holmes, Paradise Lost
(@NickHolmesPL)

The ups and downs of life are so extreme lately, but I'm so grateful for all of it. Been troubleshooting and finding ground loops etc in the studio for weeks and I'm excited to actually use the damn thing eventually.

Devin Townsend
(@dvtownsend)

Hello Jetlag my old friend... Have you come to haunt me once again.

Simone Simons, Epica
(@SimoneSimons)



DEVY TOO HEAVY

Brilliant interview with Devin Townsend in the new issue of *Hammer*, but it seems like he needs a hug – he went well deep! Really nice to see someone talk about their mental health so candidly, though – it shows none of us are above the occasional wobble.

Jay Jones, Twitter

We couldn't agree more, Jay. Devin's always fascinating, and Catherine Morris did a stellar job of getting to the heart of what drives him these days – and how he's working on improving his mental health.

HAIL LZZY

Can't believe the incredible new Halestorm album didn't make the Top 50! Was great reading about *I Miss The Misery* at least – Lzzy is a total icon and is inspiring women (and men!) around the world with her incredible songs.

Kirstie Durrant, Twitter

Them's the breaks unfortunately, Kirstie (but we do agree the album was brilliant!). With so much incredible music last year, something had to give though, and we think our team did a good job representing the increasingly diverse spread of metal in 2022!

HIT THE HYPE

There are great bands in the underground but the return of Metallica is always a good thing. I don't recall this level of buzz around their sound since *Death Magnetic*. But the individual hero award might go to Mustaine – we're just glad he's still alive and kicking ass.

Joshua Meyers, Facebook

We'd love to say we're surprised at how divisive Metallica's new single is, but some folks just want to complain. Still, everything you say here is absolutely correct – we can't wait to see MegaDave at Bloodstock in August.

THE BIG DEBATE

Metallica made a surprise return in November with not only a brand new single, but the announcement that 11th album *72 Seasons* will be with us in early 2023. As ever, opinions were split...

WE SAID

"It's the punchiest and most muscular Metallica have sounded in years. Gone are the complex structures and multiple time-changes of *Death Magnetic* and *Hardwired... To Self-Destruct* – this is as pummelling as 12 rounds with Tyson Fury."

YOU SAY

IT'S SO OLD-SCHOOL METALLICA I'M SCREAMING!
Ladyevil, Twitter

It's a short 3:30 Motörhead/Diamond Head-like fast and basic track. Not great not terrible :) The best parts are James's vocals, really like his singing here.

Michal Mieczkowski, Facebook

This was a very unexpected surprise. Definitely has a classic New Wave Of British Heavy Metal vibe going on with Metallica's more mature sound, which is very awesome. This song is an absolute banger.

Tokugamerfan83, Twitter

It's Metallica. Someone will find something to hate.
Kaydan Howison, Facebook

I haven't liked Metallica since *AJFA* but damn if my toe wasn't tapping to this. I actually liked a non-80s Metallica song?? Wtf!

Zach_beebe, Twitter

Sounds like Megadeth tbh. Metallica has stopped being original ages ago.

Sam Aviles, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/ GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



KATATONIA

Sky Void Of Stars

"This warms my gothic heart during the bleak midwinter"

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

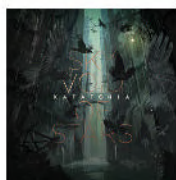


GUTS CLUB

Cliffs/Walls

"A front-row ticket to the universe's mesmerising last throes"

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR



KATATONIA

Sky Void Of Stars

"Stunning. Not that we expected anything less"

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



L.S. DUNES

Past Lives

"A post-hardcore celebration for the ears"

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

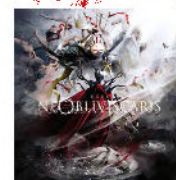


JAMIE LENMAN

The Atheist

"Power pop perfection – the ideal way to see in the New Year!"

RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

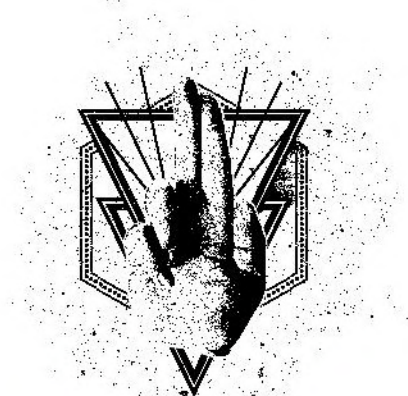


NE OBLIVISCARIS

Exul

"The perfect prog-goth soundtrack for the gloom of winter"

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



NEW NOISE

TAIPEI HOUSTON

The Bay Area brothers with a metal royalty pedigree are looking to shake up the rock landscape

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

VAN HALEN. PANTERA. Gojira. AC/DC. There's a long history of brothers in bands in rock and metal, and it tends to result in either the music being driven by an incredibly fractured relationship, as with Rich and Chris Robinson in The Black Crowes, or an almost telepathic tightness and closeness, à la Vinnie and Dimebag in Pantera or Joe and Mario in Gojira.

"We're definitely the latter," smiles Taipei Houston vocalist/bassist Layne Ulrich. "My older brother Myles [drums/guitar] showed me a lot of the music that I got into for the first time. We both think about music in the same way, we're both there for each other, and we both push each other to get to as high a place as we can musically."

Of course, when your dad is Lars Ulrich, the drummer in the world's biggest metal band, it's natural that you'd have lofty ambitions. Thankfully, the Ulrich progeny don't feel too much pressure to escape their father's shadow.

"Honestly, it's not something I ever really think about," shrugs Myles.

"We spend much more time thinking about our songs, the state of rock, and where we can carve out our niche in what we do," Layne adds.

"The desire would be that we succeed on our own merit," Myles nods. "I guess other people think about it a lot more than we do. All the bands we love have these singular voices, and we hope to have that one day."

Formed during the pandemic when the brothers reunited in their parents' house, Taipei Houston drew on their

shared influences with an express intent of recapturing the magic of the music they love.

"We both grew up listening to AC/DC and Black Sabbath, but we also love Arctic Monkeys and Radiohead," explains Myles. "So there's a pretty wide net we're casting. We spent a lot of time thinking about Jack White."

Taipei Houston's debut album, *Once Bit Never Bored*, certainly takes a big dollop of inspiration from outside of metal, but Myles and Layne haven't forgotten to worship the riff, wrapping their influences into something super-heavy and massively punishing that also just happens to have huge choruses.

"It's always been our intention to write songs with big choruses like indie bands, but also make it really heavy," Layne admits.

They've certainly managed to do that, with *Once Bit Never Bored* following in the grand tradition of two-piece rock bands such as '68, Death From Above 1979, Winnebago Deal and Royal Blood in making a noise that sounds way more expansive than that of just two people.

Getting the duo right is like pulling off a grand magic trick, and is one of the greatest challenges in music. It's something Taipei Houston are more than happy to tackle head-on – although they also know neither of them can afford to have an off day.

"Definitely not," agrees Layne. "I think what I like about being a duo is that we can give Taipei Houston the illusion of being bigger than it actually is."

"It's an interesting concept that is very freeing but very limiting at the same time," Myles tells us. "If we were a five-piece then I'd just let the two guitarists take control of the guitar parts, but here we can't do that. We do everything – we both come up with vocals, bass and guitars, swapping instruments and trying things out. It's full of roadblocks but it's such an interesting challenge."

One of the things that Taipei Houston are vocal about during our chat is their desire to be seen as a band that can inspire the same feelings in new fans as they found in what Layne refers to as "the golden age of alternative rock" – the early 90s to mid-2000s. It raises the question: what do the brothers think about the state of rock music in 2022?

"The traditionalist sense of rock as a counter-culture is more fractured these days," says Myles. "To me, a lot of the stuff I hear that comes out nowadays leans in different directions, it leans into pop rock or leans into something way heavier. It feels like bands with a signature sound and charisma are lacking – we really want to make it as unique and uncanny as possible. How do you do that with a style that has had such an insane history? That's the real challenge."

If *Once Bit Never Bored* is just the jumping-off point, then you would be a fool to bet against the duo doing it. After all, history says there's nothing more potent than an Ulrich with a vision. **H**

ONCE BIT NEVER BORED IS OUT NOW VIA C3 RECORDS

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

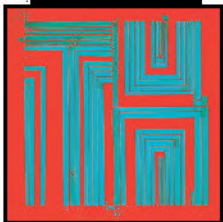
The White Stripes if Jack White binned the blues and made a Melvins record instead

FOR FANS OF:

'68, Royal Blood, Death From Above 1979

LISTEN TO:

Respector



We've seen what one Ulrich can achieve... imagine two working together!

“WE GREW UP LISTENING TO AC/DC AND BLACK SABBATH, BUT WE ALSO LOVE ARCTIC MONKEYS”

MYLES ULRICH

NEW NOISE

KÆLAN MIKLA

Bewitching synth-led post-punks inspired by the magic and majesty of Icelandic folklore

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT • PICTURES: HÖRÐUR SVEINSSON



MIRRORING THE FROZEN, sacred landscapes of their home in Iceland, Kælan Mikla are simultaneously bewitching and brutal. The band's name has similarly glacial origins, and comes from the Icelandic translation of 'The Lady Of The Cold', a winter spirit who appears in *Moomins*.

"If you look into her eyes, you freeze to death," explains synth player Sólveig Matthildur Kristjánsdóttir. "The character is like a children's femme fatale, and we relate to that a lot."

Growing up in an isolated country, Kælan Mikla often had only nature and the fairytales and folklore of their homeland to turn to for inspiration, singing stories in their native tongue about wishing stones and cunning elves, among other magical entities.

"We just played in the countryside, heard stories and sang songs," Sólveig says. "I always feel like the elves are a metaphor for nature because they're very dangerous, but very beautiful."

Since forming in 2013, the trio – completed by bassist Margrét Rósa Dóru Harrýsdóttir and vocalist Laufey

Soffía – have taken their sonic spells around the globe. Favourites of The Cure's Robert Smith, Kælan Mikla favour a fervent gothic sound, driven by atmospheric synth, haunting melodies and pensive lyrics lifted from old poetry notebooks, and the bleakness of black metal. In turn,

Kælan Mikla were invited to support The Cure at their 40th anniversary show, and were handpicked by Smith to play at Meltdown festival in 2018. They've also played alongside bands as diverse as Alcest, Placebo, Pixies and Deftones. From January, they'll be touring Europe and the UK as special guests to goth icon Ville Valo.

"We're definitely a live band," says Sólveig. "We put so much effort into our performance, I'm very proud of that aspect. We emphasise the visual arts and spend about an hour backstage putting on make-up and dresses that are always well thought out. We're like three witches screaming in your face." ■

KÆLAN MIKLA TOUR THE UK IN MARCH WITH VV



SCOWL

Scene-smashing Californians bringing emotional hardcore back with a twist

WORDS: WALTER SHAELETTRE SPESKINGO DENY WOSINSKA

SCOWL ARE THE most exciting new hardcore band going. With just two EPs and a debut – complete with atypical, cartoonish sleeve art – the Californians have taken their scene-smashing sound around the world, their stage-breaking live shows even seeing them open for Limp Bizkit at Madison Square Garden. A monumental achievement, but not one they ever planned for.

"I've never played in a band before," confesses vocalist Kat Moss. "Malachi [Greene, guitar] learned guitar just to write Scowl songs. When we started we just wanted to play local shows... opening for Limp Bizkit was never in the conversation!"

What Scowl lacked in technical proficiency, they "made up for in creativity". *Bloodhound*, the 90-second opener of debut album *How Flowers Grow*, charges forward with wild abandon, propelled by Kat's confrontational snarl, while the title track is all sun-kissed Californian summer, Kat switching gears to an emotive croon like a gender-flipped hardcore Mike Patton.

Rejecting preconceptions is immensely important to Kat, who cites My Chemical Romance as a formative inspiration. Her band share MCR's penchant for connecting with the disenfranchised, their lyrics frequently confronting issues of mental health.

"I have faced a lot of depression and anxiety," she says. "Our EP *Reality After Reality* was written in a time where I couldn't get out of bed. Even talking about it now, shame wells up, but that's why I push myself. Because when I was a kid, bands like My Chemical Romance had these vulnerable lyrics that gave me something to relate to, which is so powerful... vulnerability is so powerful." ■

HOW FLOWERS GROW IS OUT NOW VIA FLATSPOT. SCOWL PLAY OUTBREAK IN JUNE

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: If deathly winter winds could talk

FOR FANS OF:

The Cure, GGOLD, Björk

LISTEN TO: *Sólstöður*

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Short, sharp blasts of raucous, attitude-drenched hardcore

FOR FANS OF:

Minor Threat, Drain, End It

LISTEN TO:

Fuck Around

VAURUVÃ

Brazilian black metal drawing on the natural splendour and culture of the Amazon

WORDS: SPENCER GRADY

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

Tempestuous atmospheric black metal featuring Amazonian rhythms, progressive rock and Brazilian jungle genres

FOR FANS OF:

Yellow Eyes, Krallice, Bathory

LISTEN TO:

Maresia

"NATURE PROVIDES THE

truth I need to live on – it sustains me, mentally and physically," says Bruno Augusto Ribeiro. The two albums that the black metal vocalist has made with countryman Caio Lemos as Vauruvã place this life-saving ethos at their pulverising core. The Blakean gateways to the mythical realms of the imagination are Vauruvã's escape from the brutalities of an information-saturated and pollutant-intoxicated age, a malaise exacerbated by the destruction wrought by Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's ex-president, on their country.

Multi-instrumentalist Caio sees the need for a musical sanctuary as critical. "I'm an inveterate pessimist, or maybe a frustrated optimist," he explains. "I want to be more positive, because



life already throws up so much suffering. Vauruvã is an idyllic refuge."

Secreted within Vauruvã's dichotomies of hope and despair, beauty and brutality, Caio hints towards the experimental tendencies of his other projects, the avant-garde post metal of Brïi and the folky Kaatayra. Tropical rhythmic phantoms, Brazilian folk intermezzos and local field recordings all penetrate Vauruvã's ambitious

chaotic metal flux, imbuing the music with its regional feel.

"How could it be any different?" asks Caio. "This is the culture I inhabit and love. It's all there – all the patterns and harmonies – buried in the unconscious and being cast out, even if it is hidden behind a great big wall of noise." **H**

POR NÓS DA VENTANIA IS OUT NOW VIA BANDCAMP



UNDEATH

The New Yorkers reinvigorating OSDM with bowel-shaking roars and hummable riffs

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: ERRICK EASTERDAY

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

Floridian death metal that's armed with razor-sharp hooks

FOR FANS OF:

Cannibal Corpse, Autopsy, Obituary

LISTEN TO:

Rise From The Grave

GOOGLE 'UNDEATH' AND

you'll get a host of headlines declaring the same thing: that this band are making death metal fun again.

"We've never tried to posture as a tough band, because we're not," lead singer Alex Jones tells us. "We're a bunch of fucking dorks."

The geekery shines through on their second album, *It's Time... To Rise From The Grave*. Its songs combine relentless drums and low-fretboard tremolo picking with hummable yet roaring hooks. This is metal you'd mosh and scream along to at the dingiest dive bar.

"I love Autopsy, Bolt Thrower and Cannibal Corpse so much that I'd never

tell you, 'Don't listen to them, listen to my band instead,'" Alex laughs, "but we're drawing influence from what we love while adding our own spin to it."

Undeath will rampage their way across the UK in January, co-headlining a run with fellow death metal revivalists Celestial Sanctuary. Alex promises, "Our sets are very aggressive and very fun. I want people to walk away from our shows either wasted or determined to start their own band." **H**

IT'S TIME... TO RISE FROM THE GRAVE IS OUT NOW VIA PROSTHETIC. UNDEATH TOUR THE UK IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to



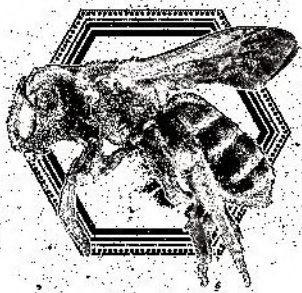
MYRATH

"MYRATH FROM TUNISIA

might just be the most underrated band ever. Their new album really excites me – they have something fresh and back it up with a great stage show. They played a tiny stage at Wacken where nobody brings more than guitars and amps, and brought a two-truck production. It was amazing!"

PÄR SUNDSTRÖM, SABATON





HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month



IN FLAMES

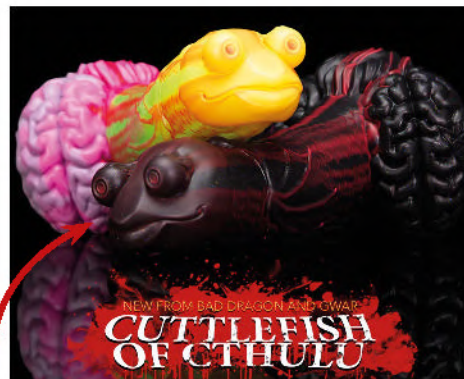
Foregone: Mailorder Edition Vinyl Box Set

NUCLEAR BLAST

£77

MELODIC METALLERS IN Flames need absolutely no introduction, and for their 14th album they've put together a suitably lavish special edition. Limited to just 1,000 copies, this box set sees new album *Foregone* splashed across two striking picture discs, alongside a CD version of the album, a sticker and a 28-page booklet. Perhaps most noteworthy of all, though, is the inclusion of an honest-to-god *pocketwatch*. It's quaint but also rather fetching, and will make a dashing if slightly eccentric addition to any metalhead's wardrobe. Plus, of course, you can use it to count down the years 'til the band's next release, or the far shorter intervals between people moaning online that the album's too heavy, not heavy enough, too rough-hewn or too slick.

tinyurl.com/foregone-boxset

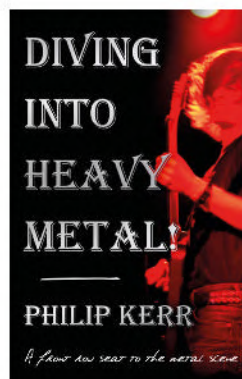


GWAR CUTTLEFISH OF CTHULU TOY

£68.50 - £163

You can cuttle-bone yourself silly with Gwar's mighty cosmic dildo – every black hole's a goal, after all. Yeah, it glows in the dark. Yeah, the XLarge model goes for 12 inches. Be right back, need to find the measuring tape.

tinyurl.com/gwar-aah



DIVING INTO METAL BOOK

£14.99

Metal devotee Philip Kerr reminisces about a life lived loudly. The book covers familiar territory – listens to *Painkiller*, brain dribbles from nostril, grows up to worship heavy music – but possesses an affable charm.

tinyurl.com/metal-dive



BEYOND THE BLACK BOX-SET

£68.50

Flying the flag for True German Symphonic Metal, Beyond The Black's self-titled fifth album is getting the full box-set treatment. It features the album and an bonus EP on vinyl, two CDs, signed postcards, a certificate – all that for less than a Gwar dildo!

tinyurl.com/beyond-the-box



SKULL CHARCOALS

£54

These skeletal oddities are perfect for shisha, hookah, or erasing your fingerprints when people find out what you did last summer. Lovingly handmade and smokeless even at 300°, they also come in at an adorable 4.5cm high.

tinyurl.com/hot-heads



AVATAR SUNGLASSES

£12.85

If Ray-Ban produced sunglasses exclusively for clowns, they might look a bit like these. Avatar's Wayfarer-style shades are the perfect accessory for chilling by the beach/pretending to read and understand the band's wild narratives.

tinyurl.com/avatar-glasses



SINNER HOODIE

£40.99

Boinking, booze and heavy metal might not set you on the stairway to heaven, but since that's all tosh anyway, why not revel in and advertise your sinner status to fellow hedonistic souls with this statement hoodie from Dark Moon?

tinyurl.com/sinner-hoodie

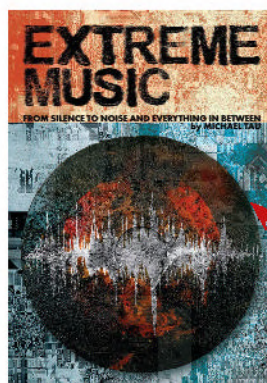


SWORD CAMPFIRE ROASTERS

£186

Vanquish marshmallows and/or foes with these barbecue skewers – stainless steel and to scale, naturally. Packing a 'meat-shield' for safety and assuredly child-friendly, you won't have to worry about being a right bore again.

tinyurl.com/sword-roasters



EXTREME MUSIC BOOK

£12.34/£23.98

Author Michael Tau takes on a weighty task: to unpack and unpack music at the furthest reaches of listenability, acceptability and, at times, *playability*. From goregrind to harsh noise wall, no stone is left unturned.

tinyurl.com/extreme-book



OZZY POSTER

£6.99

Because who *doesn't* want to be greeted by a crucifix-wielding madman leering down from their bedroom wall when they wake up in the morning? Still, it's a marginally better option than awakening to the *Diary Of A Madman* art.

tinyurl.com/poster-of-ozzy



TREEBEARD SNOWGLOBE

£73.99

The Long Winter is coming... Shake yourself out of the winter blues with this ornate, Tolkien-inspired snowglobe, cast if not from ancient oak then the finest polyresin known to man, Hobbit, or indeed grumpy old Ent. Allow yourself to be hasty this one time.

tinyurl.com/ent-globe



SKÁLD T-SHIRT

£21.50

Roots, branches, runes and elves? Yep, French folk act Skáld have returned with their newest Nordic-focused opus, *Huldafólk*. So slip into this slinky black tee and prepare to dust off your lyre for another hymnal chant-along. Skáll!

tinyurl.com/skald-tee



HELLFIRE CLUB LAMP

£26.99

It might not be quite enough to keep Vecna and his dastardly minions at bay, but this *Stranger Things*-approved lamp will at the very least brighten up the basement and illuminate those all-night Dungeons & Dragons sessions.

tinyurl.com/hellfire-lamp

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VILLE VALO



AFTER LIFE

Following the dissolution of his lifelong band Him, Ville Valo faced an identity crisis. Now reborn as solo artist VV, he's got a new heartagram and a bright future

SONNETS: ALEXANDER MILAS • ILLUMINATIONS: JOHN MCMURTRIE





It's a gloomy November evening in London and inside the crystalline bowels of the Universal Music tower there are dark goings-on under a winter moon. An arcane gathering of power brokers, decision makers and tastemakers has convened to hear the first, dulcet tones of a new record in its entirety – a lyrical and melodious exsanguination called *Neon Noir*. Less an album, the subject of tonight's attention is more like a swan song played in reverse or a departed loved one's voice heard in the wind. We'll get to that.

There are no robes here, such vestigial ornaments long since done away with to provide anonymity on public transportation, but the importance of these proceedings is in no way diminished. This is how the music industry in all its mysterious dealings determines where and when its various powers are to be invoked – an Illuminati-like network of aligned hands is this rogues' gallery of journalists, label managers and festival promoters. Even the helmswoman of the gazette you hold in your very hands can be seen lurking in the shadows.

At the centre of the dim chamber stands a lone, flat-capped figure, his chiselled visage peculiarly, vampirically unchanged by the many years since he first graced the cover of an international publication such as this, and let it be said that he was never a stranger to these folios.

If anything can be said of Ville Valo's appearance it's that he could teach anyone half his age a thing or two about self-presentation – and, for the record, they'd be 23 at time of publication. Svelte, casually besuited and elegantly understated in his attire – all different hues of black, obviously – he's been affably chatting with the gathered conclave with such fluidity and confidence that anyone would think it's something he does every day, and anyone who knows his incongruous penchant for reclusiveness when off the stage would suspect that maybe he's changed since we saw him last.

For the record, he does not, and he has not. Ten long years have passed since His Infernal Majesty's final release, the career summation that was 2013's *Tears On Tape*, and it has been five years since Him played their final note on the second of two sold-out nights at the London Roundhouse in December of 2017. Their concluding song was the aptly chosen, syrupy dirge of *When Love And Death Embrace*, and the mortuary pallor of its refrains couldn't have been better matched to the forlorn mood of that distinctly funereal moment.

For many, it was a farewell to one of life's few constants: Him were less like a band and more like a comforting gothic world to those who fell prey to its blackened enchantments, and as if further affirmation is needed, no one in the field of music has since emerged to even remotely fill the heartagram-shaped hole left in Ville's wake. As the lights in the venue went up to reveal no shortage of streaked mascara, it would have been impossible to surmise whether we'd ever hear from Ville again – such was the finality of that tour and the deathly vibe of that night.

More desolate still was the long silence that ensued after the 26-year adventure he spearheaded under an iconic banner designed by his own hand. Eight records, ten million sales and countless fans getting heartagram tattoos of

variable quality were the tallies of Ville's musical ledger. It was over. Him was dead. Their founder was gone. And then, quietly, headless blooms began to flank his headstone.

First came the news that he was blowing off the cobwebs to undertake a tour of Finland to record and perform songs by the late, beloved Finnish singer-songwriter Rauli 'Badding' Somerjoki, with Somerjoki's old band, Agents. The project smashed the charts in Finland before they eventually disbanded.

More silence followed until March 2020, when an unheralded EP was released under a new banner, VV, complete with an updated reimagining of the famed heartagram. A portent of what was to come, *Gothica Fennica Vol. 1* was far from alien to anyone familiar with Him's long-established sound, but it also bore the hallmarks of a songwriter unbound by the restraints of collaboration or co-writing. As the world smouldered, it was a hopeful omen that perhaps not everything had been lost to the pandemic.

We retreat from the listening session to a quieter room to shine to shine a neon light on the story of the rebirth and toil that followed, a res-erection-

Ville shoots a look as if to say, 'You're not gonna write that, are you?' Well...

"Promo tours are like Bullet-point for my Valentine."

Ville has sunk into his armchair, a body deflated. We've just been talking about the sometimes less-than-rock'n'roll demands of album promotion, and how while just 10 years have passed since Him's final release, a lifetime of change in the industry's inner workings has followed. It's Thursday and Ville's

already done the rounds in Berlin this week, plus a big photo session, too – rumour has it that a smoke machine for a cover shoot triggered a confrontation with security here yesterday. Whoever the photographer was that bolted the door shut so the shoot could continue remains a mystery at the time of going to press.

But despite Ville's tiredness after two days of media-based pokes and prods and his first international flight in five

years, he's still exhibiting a remarkably playful way with words: the product of voracious reading and self-confessed Anglophilia that can make it easy to forget this is his second language, although as we'll soon discover there are some words that resist translation.

We're reflecting on how many times he's appeared in the pages of *Metal Hammer*. I produce a photo from many years gone by, taken by Mick Hutson. It's Ville, looking like a goth deer caught in headlights, sitting in the back of a limo between the late Dimebag Darrell and Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx on his way to the *Metal Hammer* Golden God awards. He smirks.

"It was a playground, wasn't it?" he says of the Ville of yore. "Oh my god, that was a weird one. I remember Dimebag – he'd been up all night, and there's me stuck in the middle. I gave my Golden God award to Zakk Wylde's daughter. He told me she was a huge fan and I'd had a sip too many, so..."

And let it be said that by the time Him went stratospheric – a runway stretching between 2000's *Razorblade Romance* and 2003's definitive *Love Metal* – there were few publications



"I FELT LIKE AN OUTCAST. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MYSELF"

Post-Him and post-pandemic, Ville Valo has reinvented his work



VILLE VALO

This musical pair of
bell-bottoms goes
well with a cap



that weren't peppering their pages with images of Ville. Photogenic but, more importantly, hilarious, his wry and dismissive self-regard tempered the styled polish of his many covershoots. In a time when emo was king, Ville brought something current but gleefully out of step with fashion, musical and otherwise, but he persevered because, arguably, beyond the music he possessed that rare quality that escapes so many whose trade is on the road and in music studios. He was interesting, and Him and their legion of fans were their own movement. For a time, if you ever stood at the back of one of their sold-out shows, it looked something like Beatlemania directed by Tim Burton.

What would you say to yourself back then? He smiles and takes a moment before replying.

"It isn't a horror movie thing, but my oldest self has whispered to my younger self many times. You know, I could have done stuff way wiser in the sense of trying to become more successful in terms of money, listening to record companies or whatnot, because people had a damn hard time trying to figure out what we were all about. I wouldn't do anything differently because then I wouldn't be here – that's the beauty of it."

And, tracing the course of what Ville did, what he's doing now, there's little to suggest that anything has changed in terms of his resistance to the common methods of self-promotion. In a time of compulsive micro-blogging and algorithm-feeding content, the official 'Heartagram' Instagram account posts at roughly the same rate as the Vatican. Be it about the preservation of mystery or a refusal to play the game, let it never be said that he didn't do it his way.

"I'm a slow learner. I only learned about the eggplant emoji yesterday! But as for those whispers, it's something to do with the nonlinearity of time," he continues. "I had some foresight to the pandemic, though, and found myself a house with a photography studio which I turned into a music studio. It's one big room that enabled me to spread around all the weird pieces of kit from all eras – sort of my creative central. During the pandemic, that's all I did. There was no rhyme or reason, I just thought it was time to move on and do something different. It could have been my older self whispering to my younger self in the middle of the night, like, 'Now's a good time. You'll understand it better in a few years.' So yeah, it could be one of those things."

We notice a white wall in the corridor is covered in dozens of Sharpie signatures from fellow artists who've passed through. Some are small, while pop groups Bastille and Westlife have gone big with huge cubital letters. Unimpressed, Ville reaches for a glow-in-the-dark VV sticker from his breast pocket and wryly sticks it up at the top. Always a rebel.

Was it hard to decide which direction to go in after Him?

"Musically, I'm a pair of bell-bottoms," he says. "If you want to follow hits, you're always going to be too late. Music and art is essential for my wellbeing, it's the air that I breathe – it's natural for me, but at times I've felt like a human among the lizard people, an infiltrator from another galaxy. The only thing I can do is the thing I can do."

Of course, it raises the question of how VV and indeed *Neon Noir* came about. That Ville has always presided over every detail of his music is no secret – there's never been a doubt as to whose vision it all was, and the ending of Him is just as important as the beginning we're here to discuss.

As anyone who's seen the end of a relationship will know, the signs of impending demise can appear long before the cracks emerge, and the conclusion of Him was no different. To paraphrase a singer named BB on the prologue to VV, the thrill was gone...

"Expiration is funny when it comes to bands," he says matter-of-factly. Whatever wounds may have been inflicted, they have long since closed, and he's at ease when prompted on what went down.

"It didn't happen overnight – we'd started having trouble after *Tears On Tape*. Gas [Lipstick] had left the band and we found a new drummer, which was fantastic for a time, but we just couldn't find it in ourselves – a new album. We started working on ideas, but they didn't sound very good. The adult way to approach things is that if it's something you really do love, you have to love them enough to let them go when the right moment comes. The spark was no longer there, so timing-wise, it was good – I wouldn't have minded it to happen a little earlier because now I see the end of my own career in the distance. I never wanted it to feel like a job. You'll see bands touring where it quite clearly is. Something so central needs to be full of passion and laughter and joy and tears – dramatic, like a pint of milk."

Dairy funny. Have you been in touch with the guys since then, we ask?

"I haven't been in touch with Gas in more than 10 years," comes the reply. "And Linde [Mikko 'Linde' Lindström, guitarist] is quite a solitary fellow who's not a big talker anyway. But Mige [Mikko 'Mige' Paananen, bassist] was a bit of a Rick Rubin on the album. He was like this weird guru that came by every three months and gave me a stamp of approval, like, 'Yeah, this is fine.' He's one of my earliest childhood friends and one of my best mates still, so we keep in touch – that's rare. It's been 35 years or something..."

It was that relationship that provided something of the lifeline that Ville needed.

He describes the feeling after Him's final show as something akin to phantom limb syndrome, where amputees report sensation in appendages that are no longer there.

"I felt like an outsider, an outcast," he says. "[I felt like] I didn't understand myself, and that the world doesn't understand me or that I didn't belong. It's a profound feeling, you know, to existentially feel that you don't understand the world or your place in it. Funnily enough, how I got through that was writing. The pandemic really painted everyone into a corner. I wasn't suicidal, but there was a tinge of depression as well, not seeing tomorrow or the worth of the day after tomorrow. People reacted in different ways. I forced myself back to music, and music gave me the gift of song once again. I was able to pull off a couple of Sabbath rip-offs, so that made me feel better. That was a big deal."

Ville will go on to animatedly recount how the loss of purpose and trajectory coupled with the worldwide shutdown was in some sense the perfect reset post-Him, and while he hit a very low ebb, it was precisely the kind of downtime he needed and hadn't had since Him's formation when he was just a teen.

"There was no scheduling, nobody to communicate with about what I was working on, so it was very unfiltered intuition, straight to tape or whatever recording medium, and I found myself having goosebumps like I'd never had before. Well..." his eyes impishly go to the ceiling, "musically, at least. I'm scared of stuff being really repetitive – it's nice to enjoy a binge watch on Netflix, but you're never gonna get the time back. That doesn't mean, 'Don't do it!' But enjoy ▶



"I ONLY LEARNED ABOUT THE EGGPLANT EMOJI YESTERDAY!"

the now, take advantage of the time. That's what we'll be doing when we go on tour with the band next year, challenging myself to do lots of things and not step into a sort of zombified existence. People are so distracted..."

At the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*, the main character – Dante Alighieri's Pilgrim – wrote of finding himself in a dark wood halfway through the walk of life; the straight path, lost. It was a roundabout way of describing the confusion that can come with middle age, but in his mid-40s and with the deep shadows and brilliant highlights of an illustrious career in the rear-view mirror, I wonder aloud if the same could be said of the current predicament.

Dante's come up because, as is often the case with Ville, the subjects of language and literature are never far away. I ask him to elaborate on that tinge of depression he's mentioned, and he says one thing and lets it hang in the air: "Kaiho."

Sorry?

"Kai-ho," he says again, slowly.

It's a Finnish word, he explains, that defies direct translation but describes the twist of emotions

he was detangling in the wake of a lifetime on the road and in the limelight. "It isn't a negative feeling. It's a bittersweet reverie. I think Finnish people find it profoundly positive as well, because it also means that you have lived, you have loved and that you experience things that actually make a difference, at least to you personally, hopefully, for the people around you."

Did you struggle?

"I had a month where I didn't get out of bed," he states. "Around that long, at least. I was pretty worried about it. I forced myself up and back to music through conversations with mates, you know, getting my spirits up a bit, but it was a weird feeling. It's not like you *can't* get up. You just don't *want* to get up. You don't want to do anything and you can't really do anything: just super-tired, some form of post-traumatic stress after all the years. It could be that it took a while for it to hit, and it coincided with a pandemic. I wasn't able to do anything, so my body and my mind told me to get the sleep I missed back in the day. Thankfully I slept it off, but life doesn't get any easier. It's getting more complicated, more bittersweet – a tough combo. A pint half full, half empty..."

Of course, the wrought-iron melody of *Neon Noir*'s various paeans to love and loss wouldn't seem correct if they came from a place of emotional buoyancy, but if the slump Ville describes really was just making up for lost sleep-time, he's making no bones about his desire to get back to work.

"I'm not thinking about the end, but what I do realise is that, thinking in logical terms, it's going to be really weird if I'm 60 and still in it, which means that I have less than that in terms of album cycles. It starts to get a bit scary because I've done music all my life, but then again, thinking like that makes me smile."

So how does a 46-year-old's vision of love change from, say, a 20-year-old's?

"Well, maybe we haven't had that 'one true love' in the traditional sense in Shakespearean drama: the overwhelming one that takes over everything. You can't compare relationships and you shouldn't – different times, different people, different chemistry, different reasons. Music is still at its best when it's a soundtrack to important events."

So how does *Neon Noir* reflect your own life?

"It's very sincere – it encapsulates things. The indecisiveness on whether I belong to the camp of Black Sabbath or Depeche Mode, the constant struggle with good and evil. *Run Away From The Sun* is the first song I wrote and I didn't know if I had a song in me at all,

but I had to start from somewhere. I had all these ideas. I started to do it and follow my intuition. I wasn't in a rush, I had no deadlines – I didn't even know if I was going to continue, and that was the most fruitful ground, because it felt real and unadulterated by pressure..."

As new as it all is for Ville, there are some things that have remained unchanged, or perhaps present is a better word. The heartagram was, after all, the gothic bat-signal of the early oos onward...

"It was everything Him stood for," he says. "I just wiggled that one line and realised it has my initials, and that was the reason I called the project VV, and I liked that it had a 'V for Victory' kinda vibe to it, and visually it had the traditional aspect to it, a current iteration of the same idea. It's symbolic, because I didn't want to force myself to take a completely different route musically. I'm not an actor, and Him all happened very organically. I was finding my voice, or whatever you want to call it, through Type O and Black Sabbath back then, and I still am."

From the mood in the room it's a welcome return indeed. It seems that for the first time in a lifetime he's found his path – with the help of a little neon to hold back the darkness. 

NEON NOIR IS OUT ON JANUARY 13 VIA UMG/ SPINEFARM. VILLE VALO TOURS THE UK FROM MARCH 10 AND PLAYS DOWNLOAD IN JUNE



"I DIDN'T GET OUT OF BED FOR A MONTH"



LIGHTS OUT

Ville Valo reveals the dark secrets behind new album *Neon Noir*

01 ECHOLOCATE YOUR LOVE

"I was enjoying a documentary on the navigational skills of bats and imagined their nocturnal courting calls bouncing eerily between the walls of the abyss in a gothic ping pong-fashion. To make sure I was communicating this musical vision clearly, I included a cowbell in the middle eight, just because whenever one can, one should."

02 RUN AWAY FROM THE SUN

"The light at the end of the tunnel can sometimes shine so bright it's

scary, and my running-away skills have been highly developed over the years by sweeping most of my issues under the carpet. There are also a few church bell samples ringing among all the 80s-inspired synth sequences, only to make sure the ever-fickle balance between good and evil doesn't err on the side of Skywalker."

03 NEON NOIR

"A cheerful memento mori if there ever was one, and my first guitar solo on record. The working title was 'Vangelis Halen' and I think I managed to get fairly close

in marrying the claustrophobic beauty of *Blade Runner* with the reckless abandon of VH, in a sort of funeral-car-crash-in-slow-motion-type setting."

04 LOVELETTING

"An ode to the setting sun and a tale of dancing on the razor's edge between holding on and letting go. A moribundle of joy in a patchouli garden, with handclaps."

05 THE FOREVERLOST

"The Finnish tourism board should definitely include 'Nyctophile Shangri-La' as a tagline

Ville: cloak and swagger



promoting Finland from now on instead of the worn-out Santanic slogans of yore. A menace-à-trois between Andrew Eldritch, Jaz Coleman and Peter Hook."

06 BABY LACRIMARIUM
"Quite a traditional love song written by someone who takes the Poe in poetry a wee bit too seriously. A study on blocked tear ducts and The Cure."

07 SALUTE THE SANGUINE
"None of the ways out are easy, so taking the road less travelled is

always the preferred method. 'If I could only say the same about the music,' mutters the little Devil on my shoulder."

08 IN TRENODIA
"A world-building exercise at its bleakest, 'Trenodia' representing a highly modified utopia lit by every shade of blue, with a suitably melancholy soundtrack played at the wrong speed."

09 HEARTFUL OF GHOSTS
"Heartful Of Ghosts is essentially a heart-wrenching tale of

paranormal love and supernatural betrayal. Sonically, this lies somewhere between a lava lamp and acupuncture... with fangs."

10 SATURNINE SATURNALIA
"Saturnine Saturnalia is romantic doom and gloom at its very finest, and probably the most Sabbathian moment there is on the album. I dug out my Excalibur – the deranged fuzz pedal and vintage army flask-combo that Mige of Him built me many a moon ago – and tended to my tinnitus with gusto."

11 ZENER SOLITAIRE
"Imagine if this was Phil Spector's ghost reinterpreting Goblin's soundtrack for Dario Argento's movie *Suspria* in glorious lo-fi."

12 VERTIGO EYES
"When you meet someone whose eyes are as hypnotic as watching the Vertigo logo spinning on your turntable, you're either in love or your drink has been spiked. This is a nod to the ghosts of the past, present and future, and a suitably hallucinatory way to end the record."

2023:

EVERYTHING

YOU

NEED

TO KNOW

It's a brand-new year, with a brand-new slate of blockbusting albums due to drop over the next 12 months. From returning heroes to the faces of the future, here's why you should get excited

10

THINGS WE WANT FROM BABYMETAL IN 2023

Thanks to the Fox God, new album *The Other One* lands in March. Here's our wishlist of everything else we want from them

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

AN EXPLANATION

"Only the Fox God knows" is a phrase both beloved and dreaded in Babymetal fandom – a maddening tease for things to come. When the band went on hiatus in 2021, they left the cryptic message "What lies ahead beyond the end of the stairway to becoming a Living Legend is something only the Fox God knows." What does it mean? Well, we haven't got a clue! Presumably it ties in to *The Other One*'s concept, but it's all a mystery right now.

MASSIVE PRODUCTION

At this point it pretty much goes without saying that Babymetal shows are brilliantly batshit. But after a year on hiatus, we want the band to come back even bigger and bolder, especially considering we're coming off a year where bands

BABYMETAL TEAMING UP WITH BLOODYWOOD? SIGN US RIGHT UP!

such as Tool and Within Temptation raised the bar. Considering they're out on the road with Sabaton and Lordi, we're not accepting anything less than utterly mind-blowing.

SPECIAL SHOWS AROUND THE WORLD

Babymetal's summer calendar looks suspiciously sparse at the moment. While we accept this is likely down to their upcoming European arena tour with Sabaton, we can't help but wonder what else they might unveil. They've certainly got the fanbase and ambition to pull something spectacular off, so whether it's a one-day festival à la Knotfest, orchestral shows or something completely different, we want to see what Babymetal are truly capable of.

MORE COLLABS

Metal Galaxy brought in a bunch of guests that made the record feel like a huge crossover event. Joakim Brodén, Alissa White-Gluz and members of Polyphia all made their presence felt in unique ways that really complemented Babymetal's sound. But where *The Other One* will go is anyone's guess; symphonic tinges on the first singles suggest the likes of Tarja Turunen or Sharon den Adel could be a nice touch, while in pure OTT-overload we'd love to hear Electric Callboy's Eurodance vibes fed into the Babymetal framework. Otherwise, appearances from viral metal sensations like Poppy, Spiritbox or Harper could really push the boat out and show how metal is evolving in the 21st century, adding entirely new flavours to the palette. Speaking of...

FUN!

Babymetal's return in the latter half of 2022 was undeniably exciting. *The Divine Attack* and *Monochrome* singles brought the band back in a big way, but we must admit we clocked some big shifts in their aesthetics. This looks like a more mature, brooding incarnation of the band, which is admittedly pretty interesting, but we won't pretend we're not hoping for at least one dose of the OTT hyperactivity of *Gimme Chocolate!!* or *Megitsune*.

A NEW MEMBER?

Now we're really heading out into the fringes. The departure of Yuimetal in 2018 was a shock to fans, and ever since Babymetal have forged ahead with Su-metal and Moametal up front. But – and don't mind the tinfoil hat – could *The Other One* refer to an as-yet unrevealed third core member? They say three is the magic number...

MULTIMEDIA TIE-INS

In a world of digital livestreams, metaverses, comic tie-ins and band-made movies, it stands to reason that a Babymetal concept record would open plenty of opportunities for translating that story to multiple mediums. Whether they went for the Japanese art forms of manga or anime, or created their own films, comic books or beyond, you can bet it would be epic.

MORE EXTREMITY

Thus far, the singles from *The Other One* have played things fairly straight, with *Monochrome*

and *Divine Attack* delivering a sense of scale but skimping somewhat on the heaviness. After drawing on Scandinavian melodeath for *Metal Galaxy*, we want more extremity in the mix – a bit of *Starlight* ferocity to really highlight how diverse Babymetal's sound is.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

One of *Metal Galaxy*'s biggest strengths was just how much Babymetal played with stylistic palettes. *Oh! Majinai* was full oom-pah folk, while *Shanti Shanti Shanti* seemed to draw inspiration from Bollywood. While Japanese idol culture has always been a massive part of what Babymetal are about, these new flavours showed the band had an eye on broader culture. Plus, if that means we could hear Babymetal team up with Bloodywood or The Hu, you can sign us right up.

SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW

Trying to pre-empt Babymetal on just about anything is a fool's errand, the band having found their fame by exceeding all expectations. Mentions of Ragnarök in the lyrics to *Monochrome* suggests the band are looking ahead to unveiling something completely different. '*During the dusk of Ragnarok, what are we to see / No matter how long the night, the morning will arrive*' certainly suggests that the album's darkness (thus far) is only a temporary thing, and something bigger – and brighter – lies ahead. But exactly what that is? Well, only the Fox God knows... 

THE OTHER ONE IS DUE ON MARCH 24



× AVENGED SEVENFOLD ×

Weirdness, wildness and “eye-opening” eclecticism? Bring it on!

WORDS: MATT MILLS

It's coming up to seven years since Avenged Sevenfold released their last album, 2016's *The Stage*. That record saw the Huntington Beach band entirely upending their own formula, from the eight-minute, prog metal-adjacent title track to the over-arching sci-fi-themed concept, complete with saxophones and a cameo from space boffin Neil deGrasse Tyson, to the fact that the whole album was suddenly dropped without any prior warning.

Progress on the much-anticipated follow-up may be slow, but at least the band have been transparent about it this time around. Not that taking more than six years to make it was part of the original plan. At the end of 2017, singer M Shadows told *Billboard* that they intended to get back in the studio as soon as they could.

“We’re really excited [about] where our headspace is,” he said. “Just musically we feel like we want to express ourselves with an album and

maybe not go drag [*The Stage*] out too much longer.”

So what's taken so long? Well, there was a little thing called the pandemic for starters. In an email to their fanclub at the start of that period, the band wrote that they “don’t feel comfortable working on an album this long and then releasing it with

“WE’RE EXCITED ABOUT OUR HEADSPACE”

M SHADOWS

no tour in sight”. However, they also said that they had been using the lockdown to “meticulously work on music”.

In a subsequent interview, Shadows revealed that Avenged’s eighth album was sounding “nothing like anything we’ve done... It’s a completely new

direction. It’s over the top, and it’s very eclectic and wild!” The singer doubled down on his promises of weirdness at the start of last year, telling *Hammer* that the band were influenced by now-disgraced rapper Ye (aka Kanye West).

“The thing about Kanye is that he is pulling from such great soul music,” he said. “I didn’t grow up with that stuff – my dad listened to Boston and Alice Cooper, I didn’t get that taste of black music and old soul. So, diving deep into jazz musicians... we’re not trying to do a jazz record, but the chord changes and progressions are so eye-opening to us.”

In the same interview, Shadows revealed that Avenged were going to fly to Prague to record with a 70-piece orchestra, while drummer Brooks Wackerman has subsequently promised a 2023 release date. So, new music is certainly coming. The question is exactly when, and just how weird and wonderful it will be. ■

METALLICA

A new album, an epic tour... 2023 will be their year

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

Metallica didn't just surprise the world when they announced their 11th album, *72 Seasons*, at the end of November. They surprised themselves too, at least in terms of managing to keep a lid on it.

"We've been tight-fucking-lipped about it," drummer Lars Ulrich told DJ Howard Stern. "We thought for sure this thing would leak! It hasn't fucking leaked!"

But now the cat is out of the bag. The news that their first album since 2016 will be out on April 14 was accompanied by a new song, *Lux Æterna*, a three-and-a-half-minute blast of unexpectedly old-school metal that calls back to the sound of their debut album, *Kill 'Em All*, and throws in the odd lyrical reference to formative Metallica inspiration Diamond Head along the way.

In fact, nostalgia seems to be in the air this time around. In real life, *72 Seasons* corresponds to 18 years, a period that James Hetfield says shapes who a person is.

"72 seasons... the concept that we were told 'who we are' by our parents," says James. "A possible pigeonholing around what kind of personality we are. The most interesting part of this is the continued study of those core beliefs and how they affect our perception of the world today. Much of our adult experience is re-enactment or reaction to these childhood experiences. Prisoners of childhood or breaking free of those bondages we carry."

"WE THOUGHT FOR SURE THIS THING WOULD LEAK!"

LARS ULRICH

The theme of childhood carries over onto the cover, which features images of the charred contents of a kid's room, from a broken cot to a smashed-up guitar. Factor in James's own turbulent

upbringing – raised in a very religious household, lost his mother when he was 16 – and we could be straying into concept album territory. 2023 marks the 40th anniversary of *Kill 'Em All*, too. It's all starting to sound an awful lot like a band coming full circle.

Of course, we don't know a whole lot about *72 Seasons* at this stage. The hard facts we do have are that it's been produced by longtime collaborator Greg Fidelman, it features 12 tracks (including *Shadows Follow*, *Screaming Suicide* and *If Darkness Had A Son*), and that it will be accompanied by a huge world tour that runs through 2023 and into 2024 and will see the band playing two completely different shows in each city, including two nights at Download.

Seven years between albums is a long time, but *72 Seasons* sounds like it will be worth the wait. **H**

METALLICA WILL PLAY TWO HEADLINING SETS AT DOWNLOAD IN JUNE





WITHIN TEMPTATION

Cinematic scope and 80s vibes – Holland's finest are shaking things up

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Within Temptation capped off 2022 with some of the most spectacular live shows in the band's history, bringing out the kind of stage production that would make Iron Maiden proud. Now their sights are set on finishing their as-yet untitled eighth studio album – and as vocalist Sharon den Adel tells *Hammer*, their ambitions have only grown after their recent experiences.

"It's about 85% done," Sharon says. "We want to take the time to go over the songs, change some bits and maybe get a bit experimental. The songs that we've written are already very different to what we've done before, so..."

One thing we know for sure is that the five singles the band have released thus far aren't part of their vision for what comes next.

"Originally we thought they could fit together and make a new album, but over time we wrote in ways that didn't really fit with where we wanted to go next," Sharon admits. Which raises the question, where are they going?

"With [2019 album] *Resist* we started using new sounds and that's something we want to explore. The band Enigma were revolutionary for me growing up and had these atmospheric vibes across an entire album, so that's something we want to do, but in our own way."

"MUSICALLY WE ARE ENTERING A NEW ERA"

SHARON DEN ADEL

Teaming back up with long-time producer Daniel Gibson, Sharon already sees the new album as being the most ambitious in Within Temptation's career.

"We want to use a lot of string sounds," she explains. "But something more like you'd hear in the 80s – the kind you might hear on a soundtrack. It's going to be very filmic. We're

entering a new era – not only with things happening around the world, but also musically."

Although the album's largely written, Sharon admits she doesn't know how it will shape up just yet – or if any high-profile guests might pop up.

"I love collaborating because other people always add something magical," she says. "Sometimes you get this realisation like, 'Oh, they'd be great on this' and that helps shape the song, but it's always spur of the moment."

Given they recently supported Iron Maiden in the US, could one of British metal's finest be popping up on the record? Sharon diplomatically swerves the question. "Iron Maiden are so young at heart, with so much love and enthusiasm for music," she says. "Steve Harris came and watched us every night even though it was basically the same set. I hope I can be him in 20 years!" **H**

**WITHIN TEMPTATION PLAY
DOWNLOAD IN JUNE**

JUDAS PRIEST

The metal gods are changing things up for album number 19

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

Judas Priest's last album, 2018's masterful *Firepower*, could have easily been their last.

"It was so well-received and critically acclaimed," Rob Halford told the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* of *Firepower*. "It was kind of like, 'Is that it? Should we leave it there? Should we leave the party now?'"

Cool heads thankfully prevailed, and Priest have spent what seems like an age following up that late-career highlight, though in fairness they have been distracted by a 50th anniversary tour and their momentous induction into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame.

"In essence, it's done," Rob said of the album recently, adding that he just had to lay down his vocal tracks.

Details are hazy: there's no news on the name of the album or songtitles, or the tantalising prospect of former guitarist KK Downing making a guest appearance on the album in the wake of that Hall Of Fame reunion. But guitarist Richie Faulkner has dropped a few hints as to what it's sounding like.

"It's not 'Firepower 2'," Richie recently told *The Metal Voice*. "If anything, I'd say it's a bit more progressive in places, and it's got a bit more of that [1978 album] *Killing Machine* vibe." ▶

JUDAS PRIEST TOUR THE UK IN MAY/JUNE

SABATON

This will be the Year To End All Years for the Swedes

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Sabatons bassist Pär Sundström has cooked up some ambitious and epic concepts for his band over the years, but the decision to tour with Japanese superstars Babymetal under the banner The Tour To End All Tours is a stroke of metal genius.

"I can't wait to see what they're gonna do," says Pär. "They've been hidden away for a while working on new music, so you know it's going to be pretty special and I'm sure they'll kick ass every night."

It's not the first time the two bands have played together, with the Swedes supporting the Japanese band in 2018, while Sabs' singer Joakim Brodén appeared on the Babymetal song *Oh! Majinai on Metal Galaxy*. Could this mutual admiration extend beyond a tour and into a full-blown collaboration?

"There's nothing in the pipeline now," Pär admits, before leaning in



conspiratorially. "But we've a fascination with Japanese history, so it would make sense for us to team up when we finally do explore those things!"

Sabatons themselves have several things in the pipeline, including the rest of their EP trilogy, *Echoes of The Great War*, and even a movie. "Each EP is being treated as a separate release, with its

own approach and style," explains Pär. "There's some stuff we did on the third one that is pretty outside the usual Sabaton box, so I'm excited to see how people react." ▶

SABATON, LORDI AND BABYMETAL TOUR THE UK TOGETHER FROM APRIL 14 ▶



XXX BODY COUNT XXX

Ice-T is getting Merciless... with help from Dave Mustaine

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Body Count have been more transparent than most in the build-up to their eighth album. The rap metal iconoclasts first announced in June 2021 that writing on *Merciless* was already underway. Then they confirmed in February 2022 that they had entered the studio. Now, frontman Ice-T tells *Hammer* that the band are “about halfway through” recording their new music with longtime producer Will Putney, and hope to have it out by the summer.

“We’re nine songs in, and we’re gonna put 15 on the album,” he says. “It hasn’t been the easiest album to record, simply because we’re coming off the heels of [2020’s] *Carnivore*. It was a great, award-winning record and we never got to perform it. Playing songs on the road is usually what inspires your next album, so we came into this kinda cold, from a dead space.”

Nonetheless, Ice says that *Merciless* will continue the trajectory that

Body Count have enjoyed since 2014 comeback album *Manslaughter*. He promises the songs will once again be personal and pissed off, but hit harder and sound better than before. It’s a bold MO considering *Carnivore* single *Bum-Rush* earned them a 2021 Grammy Award for Best Metal Performance.

“WE ARE SO EXCITED TO GET BACK OUT THERE”

ICE-T

“I think we are staying in the same direction. *Manslaughter* was a reintroduction to Body Count, not to just our old fans, but to a whole new group,” says Ice. “[2017’s] *Bloodlust* was even better than *Manslaughter*, and *Carnivore* was better than *Bloodlust*. We’re going to stay in the same vein, sound and production, but make better and better records.”

Merciless may also continue the Body Count tradition of using guest stars. Since *Manslaughter*, they’ve collaborated with such metal royalty as Jamey Jasta, Amy Lee, Max Cavalera and Randy Blythe.

“Dave Mustaine has got at us already,” Ice reveals. “He wants to write a song. Dave worked with us on *Bloodlust* – he did *Civil War*. But usually what we do with a Body Count album is make it first by ourselves, then call in people.”

The band are hoping to finish their work in the studio by February 2023. After *Merciless* comes out, the top priority will be playing shows in the US, since Body Count haven’t toured the country since their slot on 2014’s Mayhem Festival. A European run should follow in 2024. In the meantime, the Ice-man and his bandmates will be keeping themselves busy.

“We’re doing a compilation and we’re working on some new Ice-T music,” Ice adds. “We are so excited to get back out there.” **H**

THE FULL UNCENSORED STORY OF METAL'S MOST ICONIC BAND

Exclusive interviews with all the key band members, the inside story of their landmark albums, and access-all-areas reports from classic live shows – the complete, maggot-friendly history of Slipknot



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BURY TOMORROW

New year, new line-up, massive new ambition

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

After nearly 15 years in the game, and with their sixth album, 2020's *Cannibal*, proving to be their most successful yet, maybe it's about time Southampton metalcore crew Bury Tomorrow shed their underdog status. Singer Dani Winter-Bates certainly thinks so.

"It's almost insulting at this point," he laughs. "We're a big band now. We play big venues and a lot of people listen to our band; we reject being called 'underdogs' now. It's patronising."

This may well be the year Bury Tomorrow rid themselves of the tag forever. New album *The Seventh Sun* drops in March, and Dani believes it's the best of their career.

"It's been pretty magical actually," he says. "We're a metal band, and we're always going to be a metal band, but in the past we might have fallen into a trap of playing into the standard of what the genre sounds like. We're not doing that now, we're trying to just make great music, listening to all genres of music, allowing some of

those influences outside of metal to seep in. We might have been scared of that before, but not now."

It seems Bury Tomorrow have been re-energised by the arrival of two new members to the band after the departure of original guitarist and

"INFLUENCES OUTSIDE OF METAL ARE SEEPING IN"

DANI WINTER-BATES

vocalist Jason Cameron. *The Seventh Sun* will be the first album to feature guitarist Ed Hartwell and keyboardist and second vocalist Tom Prendergast.

"They've been great to have around," Dani says. "New ideas, new energy, new enthusiasm. We've genuinely just really gelled, and the writing of this record was such a positive experience. Plus, with Tom comes a new instrument, and we have really

experimented with those electronic sounds for the first time here, so that's a big change."

The evolution of Bury Tomorrow certainly has been an exciting one, and Dani himself is a good indicator of just how much they've improved over the years. Going back to early BT albums you can tell he was a decent metalcore vocalist, but recent singles *Abandon Us* and *Boltcutter* show he's morphed into a man with a monstrously brutal voice.

"I always thought that I was a good frontman first and then a vocalist second," says Dani. "But we've all really pushed ourselves, and you have to. I've found that death metal register to my voice and I really like it there. But you can't rest, we're always going to be looking improve, but we've made the best album we could have made right now. I'm excited for you to hear it." ■

THE SEVENTH SUN IS OUT ON MARCH 31 VIA MUSIC FOR NATIONS



IMMORTAL

The Norse black metal icons return to icy Blashyrkh

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Say what you will about Norwegian black metal warhorses Immortal, but you know exactly what you're getting.

"It's an Immortal album with all the ingredients you would expect, from fast tracks to epic long tracks," says vocalist/guitarist Demonaz of the band's upcoming 10th album, *War Against All*. "It traces back to the style of the first albums. It's got just the right biting guitar sound and the exact Blashyrkhian mood."

Still, some things *have* changed. Demonaz is now the sole official member of Immortal, after he and longtime drummer Horgh became embroiled in a lawsuit over the band's name (co-founder Abbath left in 2015). *War Against All*'s eight songs were recorded with Gaahls Wyrd's Kevin 'Spektre' Kvåle on drums and Enslaved guitarist Ice Dale on bass. Thankfully, the legal chaos and personnel changes of the past few years haven't derailed Demonaz's vision.

"*War Against All* is lyrically in the same vein as all the other albums I have written," he says. "It's a journey through Blashyrkh. There is chaos, cold and snow, epic landscapes, fire and fury. There are also other darker moods and deeper elements presented lyrically. I want to take the listener as far into my world as possible." ■

IN THIS MOMENT

Maria Brink and co promise post-pandemic heaviosity

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Featuring collaborations with Halestorm's Lizzy Hale and The Pretty Reckless's Taylor Momsen, and boasting a future Grammy-nominated single in *The In-Between*, In This Moment's seventh album, *Mother*, was all set to kick the LA band to the next level. Except it was released in March 2020 and... well, we all know what happened next.

"It got sucked into the void," says guitarist Chris Howorth of the lousy, pandemic-related timing. "We never got to tour it."

Chris and singer Maria Brink tell *Hammer* that the frustration they felt at that situation has been poured into the songs they're writing for *Mother*'s as-yet-untitled follow-up, which is due for release later this year.



"Chris has been sending some very innovative, exciting music," says Maria. "There hasn't been one song that he's sent me recently that I haven't liked."

"On a scale from 1 to 100, the heaviness of this album will fall between 75 and 100," adds Chris. "We want to go heavy because we are metal to our very core."

A change in studio personnel is helping them achieve that aim. Longtime In This Moment producer Kevin Churko has stepped aside in favour of his son, Kane.

Churko Jr will be working in conjunction with producer/composer Tyler Bates.

"We told Kane that we want him to outdo his dad," Chris laughs.

The release of the album means that ITM will finally get the chance to hit the road, and they'll be bringing stilt-walkers and fire-breathers when they do.

"We feel like we're in the playoffs and so close to the big game," says Maria. "We want to be able to headline festivals one day, and we're close." ■

THE BEST OF THE REST

Just when you thought 2023 couldn't get any more stacked, we dug deep to find out what other records you should be pumped for this year

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

2023 will be a great year for fans of old-school metal. We could be getting the first **Bruce Dickinson** solo album in nearly 20 years, with long-time collaborator Roy 'Z' Ramirez saying it "sounds brilliant". **Anthrax** guitarist Scott Ian told us last summer the band were "not that far off" from finishing their new album, so we might yet see new music this year. Occult metal icon **King Diamond** is pulling double duty – he's been talking about his first solo album in 16 years, *The Institute*, and a new record from his original band, *Mercyful Fate*. And then there's whatever the hell **Kerry King** has been cooking up post-Slayer.

There's a heap of good stuff already announced – **Enslaved** are promising proggy, blackened vistas on *Heimdal*, **Suicide Silence** are on the warpath with *Remember... You Must Die*, and **In Flames** look to be on their best form in more than a decade-and-a-half on *Foregone*, all coming in the first three months of this year. **Smashing Pumpkins** are being as ambitious as ever with *Atum*, a three-part concept record due in April. Speaking of multi-parters, the second part of **Devildriver's** *Dealing With Demons* is presumably on the horizon too, but with **Dez Fafara** bringing **Coal Chamber** back (again), it's anyone's guess when that will be with us.

Then there's the not-insignificant matter of bands that have already released standalone singles.

Tribulation and **Delain** both released new music after the departure of significant members, so we reckon we'll be seeing full releases from them in the year to come. **Royal Thunder** are returning after a six-year absence, and we'll be stunned if **Spiritbox** don't build on the success of their debut *Eternal Blue* with another album in 2023. But the one we're really intrigued by is **Gojira** – they're not exactly known for turning albums around quickly, but already we've had a taste of post-*Fortitude* material.

WE'VE HAD A TASTE OF POST-FORTITUDE GOJIRA ALREADY

Want more? Well, how's about new **Ghost**? The Swedes have chased every album since *Infestissumam* with an EP, so a couple more arena-sized bangers seems a safe bet. There have also been rumblings from **Baroness's** John Baizley that the band are planning a new record for 2023, and suggestions from **Sevendust** drummer Morgan Rose that they might be winding down soon, telling Jamey Jasta "there's not gonna be many [records] left", while talking about their new release.

There's plenty of exciting up-and-coming talent, though. **Frozen Soul** have drafted in Matt Heafy for their second record, the UK's **Urne** have

finished recording the follow-up to their excellent debut, *Serpent & Spirit*, and **Loathe** went so far as to actually cancel a planned UK and European tour to "complete the recording process" of their new release. British guitar hero **Sophie Lloyd** has also teased that her debut album, *Imposter Syndrome*, will be with us this year at some point...

Not quite "new" names, but exciting nonetheless are **Elegant Weapons** – the supergroup featuring members of Judas Priest, Pantera and Rainbow. That's one hell of a classic heavy metal cocktail. Paradise Lost's Nick Holmes and Greg Mackintosh have also unveiled their gothic synthwave project, **Host**, and former members of **Every Time I Die** have teased on Instagram they are in the studio working on their first album since the fallout with Keith Buckley.

There also whispers to suggest new material from **Mudvayne** – singer Chad Gray telling A7X bassist Johnny Christ the band would be "working on new shit soon". Arena-conquerors **Nightwish** have said their new album is completely written, even if they're waiting until the summer to record it. Speaking of sunshine, **Killswitch Engage's** Jesse Leach says their new album will be "beaming with positivity and hope", and the announcement of summer dates from **Code Orange** gives us hope we'll be hearing new music from them before long. It's safe to say, 2023 looks like another insanely good year for heavy music. ■

Enslaved: bringing the proggy
blackened vistas this year



THE CLASS OF 2023

THE CLASS OF 2023

From a groundbreaking Muslim metal band to the maverick virtuosos baiting the gatekeepers, these are the bands that will be on everyone's lips this year

VOICE OF BACEPROT

The young Indonesian trio out to smash barriers in 2023

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS

When videos of Voice Of Baceprot playing covers of *Chop Suey!* and *Killing In the Name* surfaced on YouTube, people saw something they had never seen before: three Indonesian schoolgirls wearing hijabs and leather jackets, screaming, “*Fuck you, I won’t do what you tell me!*”

Now, their own explosive, funk-metal inspired tracks such as *School Revolution* and *God, Allow Me (Please) To Make Music* have proven that they aren’t just a novelty, while opening the door to a world that had perhaps seemed impenetrable: the inner world of three pious yet progressive young Muslim women who love metal, and use their music to speak out against oppression.

“The fact that we are hijab-wearing Muslims is simply a part of our identity,” says singer and guitarist Marsya. “It was a bit of a burden at first, being considered representatives of young Muslim women in metal, but over time we’ve shifted our perspective.”

Their own songs mostly speak of their experiences as women. The incendiary *[Not] Public Property* is about female bodily autonomy, while latest single *PMS* (the tongue-in-cheek title is an abbreviation of ‘completely independent woman’ in their native Indonesian) is dedicated to “women who dare to break stereotypes, particularly when it comes to their careers,” according to the frontwoman.

The trio – completed by bassist Widi and drummer Sitti – have certainly come up against plenty of resistance in

the past. Even now, the constant attention can take a toll – Marsya explains how, recently, fans have turned up at their homes, a frightening by-product of suddenly being public figures. But the girls speak of their journey so far as overwhelmingly positive. It’s taken them from online festival performances to Wacken Open Air, an experience they’re not about to forget anytime soon.

“Oh my God, it was the best moment of our lives,” gushes Marsya, “Metalheads are so kind!”

Though they’ve got a lot on their plate simply by existing in this sphere, the girls seem mostly unfazed. At the heart of it, the band are just thrilled that they’re able to play the music they love. “The one thing that’s kept us playing music is the happiness we can’t get anywhere else,” Widi explains earnestly. “So as long as we are able, we will continue to play music with joy!”

Their next priority is to record their first album, which they hope will be finished soon and will be supported by shows in the UK and US. Marsya admits they daydream of playing Download and Rock Am Ring festivals, and touring alongside heroes such as Metallica, Gojira and Lamb Of God. Right now, it seems like all of this is possible for Voice Of Baceprot. **H**

VOICE OF BACEPROT’S DEBUT ALBUM IS SET TO BE RELEASED LATER THIS YEAR





XX POLYPHIA XX

Haters beware: these maverick Texan instrumentalists are out to drag metal into the future

WORDS: MATT MILLS

With his carefully mussed-up hair, artful neck ink and penchant for fashion, Polyphia's Tim Henson looks more like an influencer than a next-gen guitar hero. "I'll be in a restaurant and the waiter will say, 'You look like you're somebody,'" says Tim. "By the end of it, they're asking for your Instagram and taking a selfie with you, even though they don't know who you are. It's very odd."

Polyphia are out to rewrite metal's rulebook, and not just visually. They may have started out as instrumental, metalcore-obsessed teens, but the Plano, Texas quartet's fourth album, 2022's *Remember That You Will Die*, looked to modern hip hop and R'n'B for inspiration, drawing on production techniques that chopped up their virtuoso playing and peppered it with trap beats. A guest solo from guitar god Steve Vai was broken down beyond recognition, a sign of Polyphia's iconoclastic approach. Naturally, metal's gatekeepers hate them for it – surprisingly, something Tim empathises with.

"I know what it feels like to hold onto something dear like that," he says. "If you're the kind of person that's super-attached to something, then you take a lot of pride in that."

That hasn't stopped Polyphia from playing with the boundaries of what is and isn't metal. Promo shots show them posing on luxury Mercs like a well-styled boy band, while *Remember That You Will Die* features a dazzling array of guests ranging from rappers Killstation and \$not to pop star Sophia Black, with Deftones' Chino Moreno repping metal.

Polyphia's schedule for 2023 is already looking full, with a UK tour in May, but Tim is promising more new music in the summer with more collabs, namechecking Meshuggah and maverick psychedelic funk bassist Thundercat as two artists he wants to work with.

"Hopefully we can get everything cleared legally," he says. "There are going to be a lot of features. The sky's the limit." **H**

POLYPHIA TOUR THE UK IN MAY

ZETRA

Synth-heavy gothgaze from the enigmatic duo bringing mystery back to music

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

We live in a world where the minutiae of modern life are constantly laid bare under the striplight glare of social media. Many things have been devalued or dismantled as a result, not least the concept of enigma. Shadowy London duo Zetra are out to change that.

"Truth should not be revealed but worked for, and is best shrouded in riddles," say the pair, who communicate as a single entity via email. "The light of Zetra can only be created in darkness."

Here's what we *do* know about Zetra. They formed in London at the end of the last decade, and have released a series of singles and EPs via Bandcamp, many of them available only on cassette. Their sound is an icy, enveloping mix of 80s-inspired synth-pop, goth-metal heaviness and atmospheric dream-pop, capped with hazy vocals of indeterminate gender(s). The selected shows they have played have seen the pair surrounded by chains and burnt-out electronic hardware, and shrouded in dry ice.

"It has been said that Zetra sounds like synthpop wrapped in chains, a sword slicing through velvet, and like being pummelled to death with love," they say. "It has been said that Zetra look like inhabiting neon-lit underpasses in a foggy dystopia."

2023 isn't going to see the mystery lift. According to the duo, they have "relocated to the Commune" to record their debut album. And what exactly said record will sound like? "A prayer circle participated by [Tony] Iommi, Enya, Charli [XCX] and Chris Martin."

That may sound like an self-consciously eclectic list, but Zetra make no bones about their place in the scheme of things. "In 2023 Zetra will continue to insist that it is a Heavy Metal band," they say. "Heavy Metal must once more take its rightful place at the forefront of popular music. To achieve this, Heavy Metal must be exorcised and born again." ■

ZETRA'S DEBUT ALBUM IS DUE OUT THIS YEAR



SLAUGHTER TO PREVAIL

The masked modern deathcore standard-bearers cutting a brutal swathe through the chaos of the world

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

In the early summer of 2021, Slaughter To Prevail relocated from their hometown of Yekaterinburg, Russia to Orlando, Florida. The initial idea was to get a foothold in the US market, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 has made it difficult for them to go back – not least because STP's subsequent single 1984 was a protest against the invasion, treason in the eyes of the Russian authorities.

"Some platforms refuse to work with us, just because we are Russians," says heavily inked vocalist Alex Terrible, aka Aleksandr Shikolai. "I don't blame them. I love my country but I respect all other countries. I'm not political, but all I see is a growing hatred."

The situation weighs heavily on the singer, but his band are determined to let their music do the talking. Slaughter To Prevail are at the very forefront of the deathcore resurgence. Their pummelling, groove-laden brutality and Alex's insane vocal range have thrust them to the front of the pack.

"We always want to sound unique and we're still looking for our sound," he says. "But we also want to make it as extreme as possible. We don't call ourselves deathcore. We play extremely heavy metal music, we mix genres however we want."

It helps they also look incredible. The 'Kid Of Darkness' mask that the singer created and wears onstage has quickly become iconic among fans. Alex has sold more than 20,000 masks via his website, and says he's seen the Kid Of Darkness image tattooed on more than 1,500 fans.

"The mask is the personification of my soul, what is in my heart, of me, of you, of people who work every day," he says. "It gives me energy, power."

Slaughter To Prevail released their most recent album, *Kostolom*, in 2021. The world may be engulfed in chaos and war, but Alex is single-minded about what the next 12 months hold for his band: "We will release a new album that will make us 10 times bigger." ■

SLAUGHTER TO PREVAIL'S NEW ALBUM WILL BE RELEASED LATER THIS YEAR



IMHA TARIKAT

Emotional evisceration from
black metal's most intense band

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

The explosive, emotional maelstrom at the heart of Imha Tarikat is a double-edged sword. On one hand, its raw-nerve intensity helped put the band on the extreme metal underground's radar, their propulsive and chaotic BM resulting in anarchic shows where glass could fly and blood spray at any minute. On the other, the emotional and mental toll it took appeared to be killing bandleader Kerem Yilmaz.

"Things were turbulent," he concedes. "It feels good to finally have our new album out, like the conclusion for a certain part of my life. The first album [2019's *Kara İhlas*]

was about understanding my struggle with depression. [2020's] *Sternenberster* was about getting lost in pure madness, so *Hearts Unchained...* is about living through these experiences and learning. A moment of clarity after everything has settled."

Released in December, *Hearts Unchained – At War With A Passionless World* completed a stunning, visceral trilogy that cemented Imha Tarikat as one of black metal's most intense new bands. Now with drummer Melvin Cieslar and bassist Ricardo Baum in their ranks, the Germans are gearing up to spread their gospel far and wide, even looking at a potential show in Turkey later this year.

"My parents are from Turkey, but it's totally different going as a musician," Kerem says. "The country has a really strong underground scene, everyone goes crazy, so I can't wait to go back."

As for the rest of the world, he admits to some interesting role models when it comes to taking his explosive black metal to the masses. A million black metal bands might be inspired by Motörhead, but Imha Tarikat might be the first inspired by Mötley Crüe.

"Man, those guys were rock stars," he says giddily. "It got me thinking, having so many people attend your shows must be great. Maybe we should try that! Ha ha ha!"

HEARTS UNCHAINED – AT WAR WITH A PASSIONLESS WORLD IS OUT NOW VIA PROPHECY



IN FLAMES

(MELO)DEATH CONQUERS ALL

In Flames have spent 20 years moving away from their melodeath roots, despite blowback from their staunch supporters. So why are they bringing it back now?

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: JAKE OWENS





“This is the In Flames we love!”
 “This song feels like they’re waving to their older fans saying, ‘We haven’t forgotten about you.’”
 “After a dozen long years I can finally pick up a new In Flames album.”

These, plus thousands more comments of relief and adulation, await when you look up In Flames’ blistering *State Of Slow Decay* on YouTube. The lead single from the Gothenburg five-piece’s impending 14th album, *Foregone*, was the first wholly melodeath music they’d released in 22 years. It also marked the ceasefire in the war between the band and their oldest fans, who for the same span of time had craved completely different things.

In the early 2000s, In Flames ditched the growls and guitar harmonies of the genre they’d helped define, replacing them with nu metal melodies and electronics. And they’ve been steadfast in their refusal to cave in to pressure and turn back. However, when *Hammer* sits down with frontman Anders Fridén and guitarist Björn Gelotte in the lobby of their rather fancy London hotel, something unprecedented happens: the singer admits the band’s latest material has been lacking.

“I feel that some of our mixes have been too laidback,” Anders reflects, talking with a stern honesty he maintains throughout our conversation. “We didn’t realise it back then. When we had this break during the pandemic, me and Björn talked about what we wanted to do. The first thing we both said – and the first thing that Howard [Benson, In Flames’ producer] said to us – is that we should bring the guitar and drums back to the forefront. We want to make In Flames more

‘metal’, whatever that means, production-wise. We had a lot of great songs on the last few albums, but they could have had a bit more punch and attitude.”

Purists will doubtlessly roll their eyes at anything less than In Flames totally disowning their post-melodeath era. However, *Foregone* does much more than simply add “punch and attitude” to the band’s production. It gives their songwriting an overdue boot up the arse as well. Composed of both the savagery that defined their earliest years and the arena-ready hooks they’ve specialised in since, *Foregone* is In Flames’ best album in at least two decades. Every member of the band has their abilities tested from the off, as *State...* plummets from pounding chords to a flurry of high-speed drumming and intricate fretwork. Then Anders’ roars cut in, before the single’s latter half flaunts his clean singing with a fist-pumping chorus.

And that’s just the first song. *Meet Your Maker* continues apace with its thrash metal opening, pairing open-string chugs with double-kick percussion, while *The Great Deceiver* ignites flashbacks to classics such as *The Jester Race* with its harmonic guitar leads. Even when *Bleeding Out* and *Pure Light Of Mind* lean nearer to modern In Flames with their electronic undercurrents, Howard’s production emphasises the drums to keep the grit under *Foregone*’s fingernails.

“We haven’t just looked back and made ‘The Jester Race Part 2’, because that would be stupid,” Anders explains. “It wouldn’t be true to that album and we’re not the same people as we were back then. So, we’re keeping all of those roots with us but still looking forward to the future.”

The question is: why now? In Flames began to fob melodeath off as far back as 2000, when they started

emphasising keyboards and grooving percussion on *Clayman*. Since then, further forays from their signature sound have turned acclaim into backlash, with the reviews mixed at best. *Hammer* wrote that 2014’s *Siren Charms* was “happy to knock out the same mid-paced riffs and safe verse-chorus structures that could be airlifted from any In Flames album since *Reroute To Remain*”, while last album *I, The Mask* was described as “a cynical attempt to appease radio-pluggers”.

But then the pandemic happened. By the time the world went into lockdown in March 2020, In Flames had been touring *I, The Mask* for more than a year – and finally felt stable. Between that album and its predecessor, *Battles*, the entire rhythm section had shifted. Bryce Paul replaced bassist Peter Iwers at the suggestion of his chum, In Flames drummer Joe Rickard – then Joe left citing back problems and had ex-Chiodos member Tanner Wayne fill his shoes. After that, ex-Megadeth guitarist Chris Broderick joined the band in place of Niclas Engelin just two days before the *I, The Mask* shows started in America.

Björn – as equally no-nonsense as his bandmate – remembers, “Nicas sent us a text saying that he just couldn’t do it, basically from his hospital bed. He either burnt out or hit a wall somewhere.” Why was he in the hospital? “You’d have to ask him.” (*Hammer* approached Niclas for a comment but he did not respond.)

He continues, “The day or two leading up to the tour, we got quite a lot of submissions from guitarists that were available. As soon as Chris’s name popped up, we were

like, ‘He’s one of the best guitar players we know, and we’ve known him for 20 years.’ When we toured with Jag Panzer [in 2002], he was the guy who was playing guitar all day, working out, running up and down the stairs – not a partier and

super-focused on music. He had to learn 25 songs in a day, but to him it was a fun challenge.”

Although Chris didn’t contribute more than a handful of solos to *Foregone*, he still played a pivotal part during his rookie year. “Watching his playing has changed the way I live,” says Björn, before laughing: “I practise way more now; Anders is probably super-annoyed about it. It’s never been more fun to be in this band.”

When the pandemic struck, In Flames were in New Zealand. Their shows there were cancelled, forcing them home without playing a second of music. Björn felt the frustration immediately. “For me, being onstage has always been the highlight,” he explains. “We had the next year and a half already lined up, then the pandemic came.”

For Anders, it bubbled up more gradually. “For three weeks I was walking around in my pyjamas,” he laughs. “I felt really calm. But in Sweden, we didn’t have the full lockdown. Then, when things started reopening, we got Omicron. It was like being shown the best dinner you could ever have, then having it taken away before you can eat it.”

With the duo leading In Flames’ songwriting charge (as has been the way since founder and co-composer Jesper Strömblad left the band in 2010), that agitation manifests on *Foregone*. Not only is the music louder, faster and nastier than anything In Flames have released in decades, the lyrics lament how fucked we all are. *State Of Slow Decay* rages over ever-widening political divides driven by social media algorithms. *‘I hear forgive and forget, but I see there’s no way,’* Anders sings.

“WE WANTED TO MAKE IN FLAMES MORE METAL”

ANDERS FRIDÉN

Anders is bringing
back the attitude

FOREGONE CONCLUSION?

We asked At The Gates frontman and fellow Gothenburg melodeath pioneer Tomas Lindberg to review new In Flames album *Foregone*



"I've known some of the members of In Flames since we were teenagers. The one I've known the longest is Anders. He used to play football with the twins [At The Gates' bassist Jonas and guitarist Anders Björler]. I think they

went to the same classes, even. When he was in Dark Tranquillity in the 90s, we played some shows together.

"In Flames and At The Gates were on the same page back in the 1990s, but then, of course, we broke up [in 1996, before reuniting in 2007]. And, to be honest, In Flames' music moved away from what I personally listen to. But I have this rule when I listen to people's music where I ask, 'What are they trying to achieve? Are they achieving that?', and they've always done that. Bands evolve and I know metal fans hate that, but they've been going for a while now — they should evolve.

"Compared to In Flames' last few albums, *Foregone* sounds fresh. It has elements from all the steps on their career road. The first thing that hits you is the production. It's very, very strong. Anders' vocals sound amazing, both the growls and cleans. He's been getting better and better at writing huge choruses. You can still hear Björn's chuggy metal riffing. There are even some folky parts in there for the old fans. I think the balance is better on this album. The new members complement each other as well. You have the more classical metal stuff from Chris [Broderick] and then you have almost a hardcore feel from the rhythm section.

"Going forward, In Flames have to be confident in what they want. I'd hate to see them fall into the trap of catering to an audience. It feels like they're rooted in their own history but moving forward."

Meanwhile, the words to *The Great Deceiver* were written at the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Anders asks, as he puts it, "What the fuck are we doing to ourselves?" with lines such as "Times are changing for the worse! We are doomed, we are cursed!" The chorus – "Bend the truth to fit your opinion..." – also swipes at misinformation.

Despite the speculation of many a pundit, Anders and Björn insist their newfound aggression has nothing to do with The Halo Effect showing up and stealing headlines. The freshly formed quintet are a collective of ex-In Flames

"THIS ISN'T THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST!"

ANDERS FRIDÉN

members, including Niclas Engelin and Dark Tranquillity singer Mikael Stanne, who have returned to the 90s' Gothenburg melodeath sound. In the process, they beat their old bandmates to the punch by just a year.

"I've never listened to them," Anders states, uncharacteristically briefly.

Björn has. "The one song I have heard, I thought it was Dark Tranquillity," he says. "It sounded, production-wise, awesome and obviously had Mikael on there."

"It really came as a surprise," Anders adds, "but it's fine. They can do whatever they want. It doesn't affect our music. People ask us, 'Is there competition?,' but this isn't the Eurovision Song Contest."

As apathetic as the singer claims to be, he also says he can't imagine touring with them any time soon: "Never say never, but I don't see it right now. We'd have to be talking first."

Even though they were second out of the gate, In Flames returning to their roots has finally put the band and their OG fans back on the same page. If the deluge of loving comments that's followed each of *Foregone*'s singles didn't telegraph that enough, then their Brixton Academy concert (see p.98) hours after our conversation does. Before the band bust out *State...*, Anders vows to his onlookers that the band will "never take you for granted again" – something he also said during the band's recent US tour. And, between songs that span from 1994 debut *Lunar Strain* through to the forthcoming *Foregone*, he frequently stands still, in awe of such a rabid audience. Björn is all smiles, the pit rages so hard that it's rumoured someone's broken their shoulder, and the night crescendos with a venue-wide singalong to *Take This Life*.

"I think, in 10 years' time, *Foregone* will be an In Flames classic," Anders concludes at the end of our chat. And, while Björn can't predict what In Flames will do next, he knows this album and this line-up have set the stage for a boundless future.

"The members that we have now, their skillset is not at all limiting," he says. "Now we can do crazy stuff with people that really love to show off. It makes me very much look forward to what's to come." ■

FOREGONE IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 10 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. THEY PLAY BLOODSTOCK ON AUGUST 13



In Flames (left to right): Bryce Paul, Björn Gelotte, Anders Fridén, Chris Broderick, Tanner Wayne





THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

KERRY KING

From helping to define thrash metal itself to riffing with, um, Sum 41, the guitarist has had quite the career. Does he miss playing with Slayer? Absolutely

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: MARTIN HAUSLER



As the founding and most instantly recognisable member of now-defunct LA thrash legends Slayer, Kerry King spent 38 years conjuring up a seemingly endless supply of scalpel-sharp riffs. The most notorious of the Big 4, the band were unsurpassed in speed and downright viciousness, and 1986 classic *Reign In Blood* remains the high-water mark of thrash. It's hard to imagine the state of extreme metal without its influence.

In 2018, Slayer took the surprise decision to go out on top and call it quits after a final arena tour, and Kerry's been pretty quiet ever since – although we know there's a solo project coming at some point. He reassures us it'll be just as heavy. "If you know my work, you know what it's going to sound like," he chuckles, when we ask how it's shaping up.

But the void Slayer left has been gnawing at us for too long, so we asked him to reminisce on those amazing years. "The one thing I do have right now is time," he tells us. "So, it's good to be doing this again."

From his upbringing, to the early years of thrash, to his emotions during that final run of Slayer shows, to his love of snakes, to, um... Sum 41, Kerry King has been on the wildest of rides.

What are your earliest memories of growing up?

"We lived 20 minutes south east from LA. It was a while away from the super-shitty neighbourhoods, we didn't have the very best place to live, but it was totally fine. It was pretty normal stuff, playing baseball, sports – this is all before music."

When did you first become exposed to music?

"I had two sisters and the radio. I didn't have older brothers pushing heavy music on me, I had whatever my sisters played, and you weren't going to hear anything heavy on the radio. But there were rock channels that would play Van Halen all day."

Was that the type of music you immediately gravitated to?

"Definitely. When I started caring about music, I was already playing guitar. I started when I was 13; I guess I was a late bloomer in that respect. I was more into sports. Watching Van Halen was like watching a wizard play guitar. How could you not be impressed? But it was really when I heard Judas Priest on the radio, that was my introduction to those types of vocals and guitars, which are my favourite to this day. I bought the cassette of *British Steel*, and that's when I found *Rapid Fire* and *The Rage* and the other gems. Then I found *Unleashed In The East* and *Stained Class*. That's how it all worked for me. You find something you like and you work backwards."

Tell us about your first band.

"It was a stupid band. It was called Quits... and no, I did not name it. My guitar teacher was in that band and he was grooming me to take the place of the other guitar player. I'd go take guitar lessons and he'd ask me what I wanted to learn, and if I didn't have anything then he'd say, 'Well I got this one', and you learn that. I was young. I was the dude who had a fake ID, not to drink but to actually get into the show to play."

Do you remember your first gig?

"Yeah, it was awful! Ha ha ha! It was my only band other than Slayer. It was all covers and an original or two.

Nothing was mine. We played a few shows, but that band had no potential at all. It broke up and, by that point, I knew more about what I wanted to do: Maiden, Priest, Deep Purple."

So, Slayer came together quite quickly after that?

"Yeah. I went to a few auditions for new bands, but I was never that impressed. There was one I tried out for, and where it took place is where [Jeff] Hanneman was working the desk. I did the audition, walked out, and he was playing guitar, he was playing all the stuff I liked, and so we got chatting. I said, 'Hey, would you be interested in getting together?' And I think I'd already found Dave [Lombardo, drums] at this point. He was a pizza delivery guy who lived round the corner. Jeff said to me, 'Are you the kid with all the guitars?' I said, 'I... have some guitars', and that seemed to do it. That meeting and the Dave meeting were very close together. We got together and played in Dave's garage... quietly! Ha ha ha! We enjoyed each other's company and liked the same music. That's when I got Tom's [Araya] number out and said, 'I know this singer dude' and we moved into Tom's garage and that went from there."

Those early years of thrash seem so exciting. Didn't you see Metallica with Dave Mustaine?

"Yep. They were great at that point; they were ahead of us by at least 16 months to a year. They were doing originals and we were still doing covers. I think we opened for Metallica with Mustaine, I can't recall, but I know me and Dave definitely saw them in a club and we were blown away by Mustaine. Still to this day, he's a fucking great guitar

player. It was very awesome, it wasn't big clubs, you could see from anywhere, and I was very enamoured with seeing Mustaine play these insane leads and James [Hetfield] playing these insane rhythms and barking out these lyrics. It was way more extreme than what I thought metal was or could be, it was like another arm of it, so to speak. We all came out around the same time, but Metallica certainly influenced me."

When did you start to realise that the thrash scene was going to really take off?

"It didn't take long. As Metallica found out, and as we found out, trying to get into Los Angeles was difficult. It was the land of Van Halen and Mötley Crüe and W.A.S.P. We tried the strips a few times, and we would play the deadliners spot – the spot after the headliners when everyone was leaving. We actually played after W.A.S.P. once, when they had this raw meat and the girl on the rack and all of this stuff. We were a bit like, 'OK... this is interesting, how's this going to work?', and when we came on, no one left! We thought, 'Hmm, something's happening here!' But it never really became a Hollywood thing. We just bypassed those clubs and went to the Bay Area, and then on full US tours."

Can you remember much about the flak you took for the title of *God Hates Us All* back in 2001?

"I mean, we've always taken flak for something! It was already bouncing off us like nothing. *God Hates Us All* – it's a good title. If you have an argument about it then I'll listen, but you're gonna lose. At that time, it was an album that meant so much to so many people because of what happened the day the record came out [9/11]. It was kinda prophetic."

"MY LIVELIHOOD GOT TAKEN AWAY FROM ME"

You have a history of inciting outrage from people. Where do you think that came from?

"Probably early on, Mercyful Fate, Venom, those are two of my favourite bands. I like to stir the pot, and I just like to bring things up. I like to give people something to talk about, even if they're outraged or don't agree."

You upset Ian MacKaye when you covered Minor Threat's *Guilty Of Being White on Undisputed Attitude* and changed the lyrics to '*Guilty Of Being Right*'. Have you ever spoken to him about that?

"I don't think I've talked to him since then, I can't even guarantee that I've met him. The funny thing is, Tom was doing vocals that day, he did it, and I thought, 'Huh, that's gonna make people talk.' It was an incredibly racial statement... but it was made by a Chilean guy! So, it's funny how these things get twisted. I can tell you, if I ask Tom what he meant by that today and ask someone else what they think it means... you will get six different answers."

You also surprised a lot of people by playing on the song *What We're All About* by Sum 41!

"Well... there's a whole lot to say there! It was my record label that wanted me to do it. I turned it down 10 times! A friend of mine at the label came to me at an angle that I just couldn't argue with. He was like, 'Well, you know you played on the Beastie Boys record [1987's *No Sleep Till Brooklyn*].' FUCK! Ha ha ha, he's got a point! That was my epiphany. That was before we put ourselves back on the map, those dudes were fun and they were popping. So, yeah, I played on the Beastie Boys record and I played on the Sum 41 record. I mean, those weren't choices for me, those were just career choices I made. Some people may agree with them and some people may not."

Do you remember the last time you saw late guitarist Jeff Hanneman?

"I do. I think it was at the Big 4 show at Coachella [in 2011]. He came out and it was a surprise to everyone, you know, Jeff's big comeback onstage... yeah... good times... trying to be good times."

How did you react when the conversation to stop Slayer first came about?

"Anger... what else? It was premature. The reason I say 'premature' is because my heroes from my childhood are still playing! I can still play, I still want to play, but that livelihood got taken away from me. But, anyway, on to the next chapter, I guess. We were on top of the world, and there's nothing wrong with going out on top of the world, it's a good way to go out. So, bravo for that. But do I miss playing? Yeah, absolutely."

What do you remember about that final Slayer show?

"Believe it or not, it was 'I'm so glad I didn't fuck up on that one!' Ha ha! Your mind can wander on tour sometimes, and I always know when I've got a mistake coming up! Usually when I have that fuck-up coming up, I just do a pick slide and it restarts my brain. But I did pretty good that night."

Kerry King: stirrer of pots and pretty good on a guitar, too





Those LA bonfires got pretty wild... hopefully not *this* wild, mind

“MY FIRST PET SNAKE WAS CALLED VENOM”

Really? You didn’t have any big emotional response to it? Was it like that for the full tour?

“Well... every one of those shows was a bummer! We were going to all these places and all these cities where we have all this history. We probably have as much history in London as we do LA... well, not LA, but you know what I mean. It’s a bummer to think, ‘I’m not gonna see my friends there again.’ You’d get to that country and know you were going to see these people, and you’d see them yearly. I haven’t seen them now in three years! That sucks! And the fans, too. Slayer means a lot to our fans, and they mean a lot to us. I know I will see these people again, but no Slayer leaves a big hole for a lot of people.”

Slayer fans are some of the most obsessive ever, aren’t they?

“Absolutely. I wanted to be good, not as much for me, but for the people who paid to see me. It was in my blood to not fuck up, for the people who had spent their last \$20 to see me. The least I could do was be on my game. Early on, it was different. I’ve been a notorious drinker – ‘Kerry likes to party, Kerry is where the drinking is at after the show’ – and I am, but I gave up drinking before shows because I couldn’t do it to the people who were paying to see me. It’s a matter of pride, of self-control and of giving a shit.”

And you get something crazy back from them most of the time...

“Every show! Ha ha! Of course, something happens that you never saw coming. The bonfires whenever we played LA were like clockwork. No matter how many times we saw them, we were never ready for it. It was a big blaze, very cool, very tribal. There have been some oddball things. The first time you see a kid come over the pit in a wheelchair... wow! To see the other kids and the security take such care of him, that was so cool. I burst out laughing, not at the kid, but the situation, ‘cause you’re not expecting it. Every show, man. Every show.”

What inspired you to collect snakes as pets?

“I remember this like the back of my hand. We were wrapping up a tour in Texas, and this club had a pet snake and they called it Slayer. I thought that was pretty cool. I went home and got one and named it Venom, because I was a big Venom fan. It seemed like such a cool pet for an upcoming musician, as it had this taboo about it, and it’s not a day care item. If I go on tour then I can get someone to look in on it once a day, and they only have to feed it once every couple of weeks. I’ve owned dogs and cats in the past, but if I can’t find someone to look after them while I’m on tour, it isn’t going to work. This works for me and it came together at the perfect time.”

What’s your most beloved snake?

“Oh dude, so many. I created the first one, through genetics and stuff, and you never know what they’re gonna look like. I do most of my breeding with carpet pythons. That’s the beauty of them – they’re these totally unique animals.” 

FOR NEWS ON KERRY’S SOLO PROJECT, KEEP AN EYE ON METALHAMMER.COM

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KATATONIA



WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: JEREMY SAFFER AND MATHIAS BLOM

IT'S NOT ALL AND GLOOM



DOOM

You might imagine Jonas Renkse is a right moody fella after three decades of writing heartachingly sad music with Katatonia. As it turns out, he knows exactly how to look on the bright side



Jonas Renkse was an outdoorsy child who started playing football and handball at age seven. He was, by his own admission, pretty good. But by age 14, metal had taken over. “The music thing felt so enormous compared to the sports,” he remembers. “It was a totally different universe and it devoured me.”

It’s been 30 years since Jonas and co-founding guitarist Anders Nyström released Katatonia’s debut album, *Dance Of December Souls*. The band’s sound has progressively softened from the harsh death metal that emulated their heroes in Morbid Angel to stately gothic metal, and they’ve constructed their own universe – a sort of Swedish version of Gotham, a gloomy cityscape populated by ominous birds, a place to contemplate themes of death, despair, heartache, and – whisper it – sometimes hope.

“In music you can find more of yourself, I think,” Jonas continues, speaking to us via Skype. He’s on tour, and outside the Hawthorne Theatre in Portland, Oregon. It’s a former Masonic lodge turned rock club they’ve played three times previously – and, in typical Katatonia fashion, it’s raining. “You can also find solace, you can find creativity, so it suited me very well. I was doing graffiti, also, which wasn’t very good! Ha ha ha!”

If there was a Katatonia fridge poetry set, it would feature words such as ‘sky’, ‘city’, ‘heart’, ‘light’ and ‘departure’. They’re scattered all over upcoming 12th album *Sky Void Of Stars*, like clues about Jonas’s mindset. When we mention it today, he says he’s particularly enamoured with ‘departure’.

“Certain things are always in my mind when I write lyrics, and it’s funny that you mention ‘departure’ because I like that word,” he explains. “It’s seen as a dark word, maybe. But it’s also something I see all the time when we’re

flying. So a departure is also going someplace else; it’s not always about departing as in dying.”

Jonas doesn’t know where his dark side came from. “I think it’s something that I always had within me,” he says, “because my parents have told me that when I was really young, maybe three or four years old, I would say, ‘Can I hear that song again?’ and it was always a sad song. So it’s probably just in my DNA to like that shit.”

His upbringing in southern Stockholm with his younger brother was “calm and chilled out” and he could be found exploring the neighbourhood with his best friend, finding paths behind their houses, walking on the tracks in railway tunnels and climbing hills. Then, there was the sport – which pleased his parents – and the graffiti, a relatively new artform in Sweden, popularised by American influences such as 1982 movie *Wild Style* and 1984 book *Subway Art*.

“That was also a big part of my upbringing. But my parents weren’t as happy, because I got caught a couple of times, and they had to pay some fines,” he laughs. “But you know, it was also probably expressing some artistic er... something!”

Anders Nyström was also into graffiti. The pair hung out at the same youth clubs. Most people there were into rap, but they loved metal: Judas Priest for Anders, and Iron Maiden for Jonas. They resolved to form a band... even though they couldn’t play their instruments yet.

“My first impression of him was that he was a good graffiti writer!” Jonas says. “We started to find new bands together. The whole thrash thing we did together, going from the heavy metal kid stuff to the more extreme stuff.

It’s nice to have that *process* that you can talk about, and eventually form a band.”

Twelve albums and 30 years later, Jonas has stayed true to the passion that devoured him. But on *Sky Void Of Stars*, the song *Opaline* appears to speak of midlife fears, with the lyrics: ‘These years / what a theft / 46 now / how many left.’ That’s quite sad and dramatic! “It is, yeah, ha ha ha! I agree,” he smiles.

Where were you coming from?

“When I wrote that, I was thinking, ‘Was this actually the life I was meant to live?’ I think that’s something many people ask, at maybe a certain age,” he explains. “I’ve been doing music since I was a teenager. I’m super-grateful for everything that this life has given me, but at the same time, sometimes I think, ‘Maybe I should have done something else.’ When I was younger, before I started doing music, I always thought that I wanted to be an actor, because I loved to do impressions and I like movies. These kinds of thoughts used to creep up on me sometimes.”

Did you change anything about your life, after having these thoughts?

“No, not really. I mean, music is the only thing I can do,” he says plainly, but without resignation. “It’s too late now anyway for me to change, so I’d just better get on with it, and keep trying to improve – all that.”

It’s a rare moment of explanation from Jonas, who prefers not to dissect his lyrics – a collage of memory, self-reflection and fiction – and admits he sometimes can’t make sense of them until years later. *Sky Void Of Stars* is another warm, brooding comfort blanket of an album, even featuring a soaring guest turn from Joel Ekelöf of progressive metallers Soen on the majestic *Impermanence*. But some lines allude to a break-up, with

Atrium agonising over lost love. Jonas, who has been married for 17 years, assures us he’s merely revisiting past experiences.

“It’s a heartbreak song.

I think there should be one

on every album,” he explains. “Once you’ve been through a break-up, you can relate to it very well. And it’s always just around the corner. I *don’t* expect it to happen, but it could happen. Anything could happen...”

So there’s no concept on *Sky Void Of Stars*, then. Just the normal bleakness?

“Exactly, that’s how we roll,” he grins.

Which brings us on to death, the subject of many a Katatonia song – with explicit references on *Colossal Shade*, *Birds* and *Impermanence* on *Sky Void Of Stars* alone – and the awareness of which leads to those pesky existential questions. Why the fascination?

“It’s always been there,” says Jonas. “We started out as a death metal band, and death metal was a music style that appealed to me very much, and still does, because when I was a kid I was thinking a lot about death and I had kind of a fascination for it – which I think is kind of common, but maybe it’s not something you talk about too much.

“To me, it was inspiring. I don’t know if it’s the right thing to say, but if you write about it, if you think about it, you push the limits a little bit, which makes me maybe less afraid of death, because you contemplate it more than other people. But I don’t know – that’s a question for a shrink. It’s a theme that goes well with our music, and something that I ponder about.”

From December 2017 to February 2019, Katatonia took a hiatus due to guitarist Roger Öjersson’s back injury, touring exhaustion, and Jonas/Anders’ desire to make a new album with their death metal side-project,

“BLEAKNESS IS HOW WE ROLL!”

Jonas Renkse: one happy bunny. Honestly!



Bloodbath. At the time, it was scary for Jonas, who didn't know whether they'd ever reconvene. Then they made 2020's elegiac, contemplative *City Burials*, and today it's business as usual. He doesn't dwell on that time – it was, after all, just a departure.

"I don't really *think* about it anymore," he says. "It's just a pause in history. And I'm not so much about looking back. I'm not super-nostalgic as a person. I like to look forward. I'm just glad that we're back out here, doing what we love to do."

Even if Jonas hasn't figured out what our greater purpose is in life, he is content. "I'm still waiting for that enlightenment," he smiles. "But I think it's settling with something you're OK with, or even happy with – that's a good step on the way. And then sorting out the pieces of what you want to do, and maybe expanding it to something you feel is close to your heart. People say that having kids is the purpose of life, but I don't think that's the whole truth; there's other stuff that's important as well."

He quickly checks himself. "But for some people, having kids is the main thing. We're all different!"

Jonas lives in a terraced house on the outskirts of Stockholm with his wife and their three children, the youngest of whom is four. A typical day involves taking the kids to and from school/kindergarten, holing up in his home studio, and making dinner. If there are people coming over, he'll cook a Texas-style chilli stew ("It's not a Mötley Crüe, 80s kind of life!"). He loves falling down Wikipedia holes about geography and studying maps ("I have a huge atlas, old school, but I can't lie down with it, because it will eventually stop you from breathing, because it's so heavy on the chest!"). In new song *Birds*, he recites the coordinates for the hospital where his children were born.

"I LIKE PEOPLE TO HAVE A GOOD LAUGH"

Birds are a big deal in the Katatonia universe. On the cover of *Sky Void Of Stars*, they're flocking in the rain-streaked alley between two high-rise buildings. "Early on, we said the birds represent both death and freedom," he explains, "and I think both those things is what Katatonia is all about. Death is where we began, and we sing about it sometimes, and the freedom for me is that we've made a long journey with our music, where it's changed quite a bit from the early days. We've always wanted to push the boundaries, and we never felt that we had any limitations."

Three decades into that journey, Jonas is comfortable with his lot. He's made some of metal's most expressive and unique music, following his heart instead of trends, and is sincere but not humourless, frequently chuckling during our chat. In new song *Author*, in true Katatonia style, he sings about a person writing someone's epitaph. When asked what he would want his epitaph to say, he smiles.

"I haven't thought about it, but I know Nick from Paradise Lost usually says he wants, 'Try being me!' Ha ha ha! But that's the way he talks, you know? I think that's a funny one, so I have to maybe steal that one from him," he says. "I wouldn't want a super-profound poem, because I'm not that kind of guy. I like people around me to have a good laugh." 

SKY VOID OF STARS IS OUT ON JANUARY 20 VIA NAPALM. KATATONIA TOUR THE UK WITH SÓLSTAFIR FROM FEBRUARY 10



Katatonia (left to right): Niklas Sandin, Anders Nyström, Jonas Renkse, Roger Öjersson, Daniel Moilanen

DOOM ETERNAL

Katatonia were influenced by the burgeoning British doom scene. These were the records that defined it in 1993

ANATHEMA Serenades

Featuring Darren White on lead vocals, before guitarist Vincent Cavanagh took over, the Livepudlians' debut album was heavier than two millstones around your neck. Yet *J'ai Fait Une Promesse* showcased ethereal female vocals, while 23-minute ambient closer *Dreaming: The Romance* pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in heavy music, hinting at how they'd grow.

MY DYING BRIDE Turn Loose The Swans

Incorporating theatrical violin passages, spoken-word parts, tolling bells, blastbeats and shifting tempos, the Yorkshiremen's second album was hailed as an instant classic. Guitarist Andrew Craighan's dad was the foreman of a cemetery, and the band would rehearse by candlelight with stolen statues from the graves; a photograph of one became the haunting cover.

PARADISE LOST Icon

The leaders of the doomy pack, album number four saw a huge leap forward in Paradise Lost's sound. Nick Holmes dropped growls in favour of a cleaner, Hetfieldian style, while the chugging likes of *Forging Sympathy* and *Dying Freedom* offered new momentum. It was an evolution, and saw the band tour the United States with Kreator and Morbid Angel.

KORN



"IF SOMEONE HAS NO OUTLET THEY'RE GONNA CRACK"

...said Jonathan Davis of his role in Korn, back in 1996. With the band announced for Las Vegas's Sick New World festival in May, we revisit a classic interview

WORDS: DAN SILVER • PICTURES: MICK HUTSON

In November 1996, *Hammer* staffer Dan Silver travelled to Salem, Oregon to interview Korn. They had just released their second album, *Life Is Peachy*, a sarcastic title for an album about drug abuse, sex, betrayal and revenge. In Salem, with its nondescript streets, car dealerships, burger joints and malls, Dan discovered "the sort of town that Korn were made for... the ultimate manifestation of the American Dream gone wrong". It also appeared to chime with their collective mental state at the time.

"Korn were seemingly in a bleak place," remembers Dan of his time interviewing the band. "In hindsight, it was a classic example of a band of outsiders who thrived in the margins struggling to cope with suddenly being the centre of attention."

Korn were playing the Armory Auditorium, the state guard's basketball court, in an attempt to crack their home market before heading out with Metallica. On Dan's visit, the 50s-style, stick-on letters on the front of the venue had been battered by the West Coast wind, causing a 'P' to fall off, so the legend from the gig promoter read 'MONQUI RESENTS KORN'.

"The photographer, Mick Hutson, and I thought this would be the perfect backdrop for the magazine cover shoot, but when we finally coerced the quintet outside they could not have been less into the idea," says Dan.

"[Bassist] Fieldy was particularly pissed off. After feeling the slightest of breezes brush his face, he pointedly declared the wind was making them look like 'a fucking hair metal band' and marched straight back into the venue. The rest of the band sheepishly followed the leader without a single frame being shot."

That mood continued into the subsequent interview, when, despite having covered the band on a couple of occasions for *Hammer* previously, Dan was given the shortest of shrifts.

"I'd had a fantastic time on the road with Korn in Liverpool just a couple of months earlier," says Dan, "but this time the mood was different. The band seemed tired. More wary. Guarded. Early on in our chat, drummer David Silveria took a disproportionate level of offence at me describing Korn as a 'metal band', and the ensuing bickering pretty much killed the interview dead."

During that disastrous chat, singer Jonathan Davis had been subdued and largely silent, meekly sitting back as Fieldy and David offered up a stream of surly responses. After the night's show, however, he made amends. Exhibiting an understanding of the rules of the game that his bandmates lacked at the time, Jonathan invited Dan onto his band's bus for an intimate midnight confessional.

"Jonathan was at once the charming host with the angelic demeanour and the confused child consumed by demons," remembers Dan.

And so, with just guitarist James 'Munky' Shaffer and a bottle of cheap peach wine for company, the frontman opened up about his personal lyrics, his background as an embalmer, the song *Daddy*, and how fatherhood had changed his approach to partying.

The majority of your lyrics are heavily, almost uncomfortably, autobiographical. How does it feel to bare your soul to hundreds of strangers night after night?

"I wouldn't say fun, but very rewarding and very relieving. Every time I do it, it makes me feel better – the comeback ►

from the crowd and seeing all that madness out there. I'm touching something, I think, that people wanna talk about, that people can relate to. It's hard night after night, but I need to do it, I have to."

Why do you feel the need to be so confessional?

"It's my therapy. I'm like a Coke bottle. If that shit builds up for so long, it's gonna explode, so with my music, it gives a chance for those feelings to go."

How does it feel knowing that some of the kids in the audience are only there to get loaded?

"Here, that's a given. There's kids who just come here to pick up on chicks. But I think if they come to our shows, they're gonna get a rude awakening and realise what the fuck I'm talking about and what we're really about."

Do you ever think, 'Why am I putting myself through this for kids who couldn't give a fuck?'

"No, I guess it's for me, I guess I'm a selfish bitch. It's like art – at least artists have the fucking pleasure of painting a fucking picture and putting it on a wall for everybody to see time and time again. They don't have to repeat that, but musicians have to do that. That's the whole fucking beauty of it: it's gonna be a different show every time."

When you're singing, do you think about the events that inspired the lyrics?

"I think about that a little bit, but I'm just letting my brain do what it does. You can only think about that so long before it becomes stale. I do remember those times and that does piss me off, that fuels my ass, but it's something fucking crazy. It's like doing a drug. When we're up onstage, it's like going to that place where you're not even aware of it and once the show's over, it's gone, you don't even remember."

You should bottle it – you'd make a fortune.

"I wish I could! If I could record the essence of what I feel on stage, we'd all be millionaires!"

Does singing about those experiences every night negate the emotion, reducing the original events to the status of just another lyric?

"It doesn't become reduced to another lyric, but I think it does become like that and that's part of the therapy. I wanna get this shit out, so when you think back and look at it, it's like [sharp intake of breath] 'What the fuck was I thinking?' That's helping what I'm trying to fucking do. But I would never consider them just lyrics, 'cos those feelings are very meaningful to me and what we do is very meaningful."

Is there anything that you now regret being so open about in your lyrics?

"The only thing I regret is that with the song *Daddy*, everybody thought that my dad fucked me. All I'm going to say is, he didn't fuck me."

How about the sentiments behind the song *Kunt*? Have you had a lot of flak for the attitude towards women expressed in that song?

"Yeah, in America. In Europe you call each other cunts – 'You bloody cunt!' – all the time. [In America] they thought 'cos I named it *Kunt* that it was against women. But I just wrote that song. It is toward women, but women that have hurt me in my life, ex-girlfriends and stuff like that. Women go around talking about men all the time – 'Men are pigs!' Well, fuck that! I have no animosities towards women at all. I fucking love women! Women are great. They're great, great,

great people. If I come home and talk to my girl about personal things, she makes me feel better about myself: 'Don't forget who you are...' and all that. And I go, 'Thank you.'"

Do you still find it hard to form relationships?

"Fuck, yeah. It's a trust thing. I mean, I love my girlfriend now, 'cos I trust her and she's been with me since I was nothing. She lived with me in a fucking closet in my house. She borrowed money from her parents to keep me and pay our rent. She believed in me. Now if I met some girl, it would be different; I would always have that thing in the back of my mind that she's with me because of who I am."

How has bringing up your son Nathan affected the way you look at things? Has it made you re-evaluate your own childhood?

"Fuck, yeah. Growing up, I had all these aggressions, because my father and my mother were doing all this shit, but now I have a kid and I'm in their shoes, I kinda fucking know why shit happens, I can kind of understand now. No one knows what it feels like to be a parent 'til you have one of your own."

Do you find that you have to stop yourself going down the same road as your father?

"I am going down the same road my dad did. It's killing me, 'cos I'm doing what my dad did to me in that I'm always on the road, but I tell myself that I'm making his life better in the future. He'll be pissed off with me, probably get in a band and write songs about me, and that would make me the happiest man in the world."

gOS Korn (left to right):
Munky, Fieldy, David Silveria,
Jonathan Davis, Head



"I AM GOING DOWN THE SAME ROAD AS MY DAD"

Has it affected your lifestyle at all? Can you still party like you used to?

"I don't party while he's around. I don't drink while he's at home. If he's at grandma's house, I can go out and party and get fucked up and go home. Once I came home fucked-up drunk, high on speed, looked at him and it killed me – that look in his eyes. I felt like a piece of shit. I've never done it since, I cannot look at him. I think he saved my life – the way I was going I was gonna kill myself, dying from drinking."

How emotionally or mentally stable are you right at this moment in time?

"A psychologist said I wasn't ready for the asylum, but I do have problems. I've got a way to deal with them and I have an outlet. Everybody does something, be it killing people, be it writing poetry, be it doing art, whatever. Everybody needs an outlet. If someone has no outlet, they're gonna crack."

So it's Korn or mass murder.

"I delved down and fucking cut up dead bodies. What would be the difference if they were alive?"

A long jail sentence?

"That's the only fucking thing. And that goes down to what society says is wrong. Lions kill deers to be able to eat. We're all fucking animals when it comes down to it."

The only difference between us and animals is that we can communicate. We're just advanced fucking monkeys."

Are you running out of personal experience to draw on for future lyrics?

"I dunno, man. I've never ever thought about shit. On this album we just went into a hotel, I got shit-faced drunk. And when you get drunk, emotions come out, you know that, and I wrote five songs. I've done songs sober, too, and I've done songs fucked up on speed. You need stuff to bring things out of you, 'cos your body naturally hides stuff away because you don't wanna deal with it. I've done songs about bandmembers, I've done songs about friends, I've done songs about childhood shit. I'll just dive deeper into what's up."

Would you say that you have a depressive personality?

"Oh yeah. Ever since I was little, I've always had to bear that shit anyway. It's always what I've been taught – nice people keep quiet, or whatever. I'm not gonna walk around [going] 'Fuckyoufuckingfuck..', that's not right."

Unless you're onstage... What demons still drive you to write and perform as you do?

"To prove that I am who I am. The press has always come out and said I'm not this and I'm not that. I'm just basically struggling to prove what I am. That keeps me going. A lot of people don't take me seriously."

The English press has generally been sympathetic to your cause. Is the American press not so?

"I got one from *Entertainment Weekly* saying, 'I'm glad Jonathan Davis can capitalise on his bad childhood, like everybody had in this fucking country, to make money out



"I DELVED DOWN AND CUT UP DEAD BODIES"

of it.' That really made me fucking mad. Who's this fucking bastard to say that? These are my feelings you're talking about. And I'm not putting my feelings out to make money at all. I'm putting my feelings out for myself and other people. If I get money, that just comes with it. But I'm not one to be money-hungry. Fuck them. Fuck those scared little bastards."

Whenever I think of Korn, I'm reminded of the Denis Leary joke about the American trend to whinge about coming from a dysfunctional family. Sometimes life doesn't work out the way you want, so get fucking used to it.

"That's human instinct, just to fucking look the other way. You make fun of anything you're scared of: dying – oh, you're gonna die now, HA HA HA HA HA! It's a human emotion. And when I say really, really real things, people get scared and there's a backlash, 'cos they don't wanna deal with the reality that's in front of them. The truth hurts."

Playing Devil's advocate, a lot of people choose not to go through their therapy in public and inflict it upon others. "[Sarcastically] I guess I'm a big tanking motherfucker. I'm going out there tanking people, telling them my problems

and hoping they'll feel sorry for me. I don't want their sorrow, I just want them to appreciate what I'm doing. Don't feel sorry for me, that's the last thing I want."

Are you worried about being seen as just another whining American?

"Not at all. There's 1,700,000 people that like us. Fuck that." ■

THE EARLY DAYS

In 1996, we didn't know Korn that well yet, so we got Jonathan and bassist Fieldy to fill us in

HOW DID YOU MEET?

Jonathan: "Our dads played in a band together."

Fieldy: "Me and him almost had the same lifestyle.

We did the same shit, our parents hung out – they did the same shit. They'd park a big old GMC truck with a bunch of beer in the foothills and watch us ride motorcycles. They practised in the garage while we were sneaking beer from their refrigerator and drinking it in our bedroom. They were why our mums did coke!"

Jonathan: "You got to do what I wanted to do, though – I couldn't be cool. My father wouldn't let me do anything, that's why I became a nerd."

Fieldy: "My dad was trying to throw a guitar in my hand when I was, like, six."

Jonathan: "My dad tried to keep me away from one."

WHAT WERE KORN LIKE IN THE EARLY DAYS?

Jonathan: "When Korn wasn't even signed, I used to wear a full face of make-up and an army-green jumpsuit – I was a total goth kid doing my shit. When we were coming up, I was just looking around and seeing all these people do this and going, 'I don't wanna be another one of those motherfuckers! I don't need to hide behind make-up; I just wanna be real.' So I chose not to wear it anymore."

JD, Fieldy and David:
a band of a different stripe



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KATATONIA

Sweden's godfathers of gloom fuse the poignant and the primitive

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: KATJA OGRIN

Katatonia: still at the bleak peak of their powers



KATATONIA

Sky Void Of Stars

NAPALM

Sweden's dark prog masters keep living up to expectations

WHILE MOST HEAVY music can be traced back to one seminal root or another, Katatonia's sound has always seemed to magically materialise, fully formed, bereft of cliché, and owing nothing to anything but the gentle grip of darkness. The key can be found in the seemingly intuitive songwriting of founder members Anders Nyström and Jonas Renkse: irrespective of which of them is wielding the pen, their songs consistently

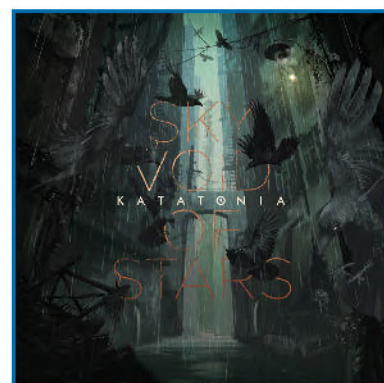
A SOLO BURSTS THROUGH LIKE A LIGHTNING BOLT

defy the usual rules. Intricate riffs intertwine in wild, alien ways; huge melodies erupt from unexpected points in tangled, tempestuous rhythms; colossal emotional crescendos transform into moments of breathtaking fragility and restraint. Whether by fortune, design or a mixture of the two, Katatonia have long been one of the most authentically progressive and unique bands around. As a result, expectations around a new album are always high and, pleasingly, usually met.

Sky Void Of Stars is the Swedes' 12th full-length. Much like 2020's *City Burials*, it finds them savouring a slender but unbreakable connection to the

more primitive, doom metal endeavours of their distant past, but expressing it through more of that quietly miraculous songwriting.

Another thing that defines Katatonia is that they're intrinsically unsuited to the age of short attention spans. Opener *Austerity* is a beautifully paced, rhythmically complex thing, and the perfect, propulsive entry point for diehard fans, but it is also a song that reveals more secrets with each compulsive spin. *Drab Moon* weaves several superficially simple elements into a bewitching symphony of textures and languid vocal hooks, while both the angular metal bombast of *Author* and the armour-plated goth grooves of *Colossal Shade* find room for curious detours and small but telling changes of mood.





Sky Void Of Stars reaches a startling emotional peak with *Impermanence*. A glacial ballad with a heart of purest doom, it drifts majestically along until a rapturous, old-school guitar solo bursts through the clouds of reverb like a lightning bolt. It's one of the most powerful things Katatonia have ever released.

Even at their most straightforward, Katatonia are always pursuing an ornate, tangential course. *Opaline* begins in elegant, downbeat mode and builds up toward a chorus of undeniable hugeness, but with an endlessly inventive arrangement bubbling away beneath. *Birds* is a succinct, high-octane banger by the Swedes' usual standards, but Jonas's insidious, askance melody lifts it into a much stranger realm. *Atrium* is the closest thing Sky... has to a straight-

forward pop song, albeit one steeped in the ominous clangour of 80s goth and bolstered by chirruping strings and a chorus hook that, if one were daring, might even be described as upbeat. In wild contrast, *No Beacon To Illuminate Our Fall* is a brooding splurge of interlocking riffs and sumptuous prog dynamics, with a nuanced performance from Jonas that will break the hardest of hearts.

Bowing out with bonus *Absonder's* elegant labyrinth of pristine beats and spaced-out, bluesy prog, Katatonia sound as absorbed in their meticulous, mercurial work as they ever did. The only predictable thing about *Sky Void Of Stars* is how absurdly fucking great it is.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Swallow The Sun, Opeth, Amorphis

DOM LAWSON



AHAB *The Coral Tombs*

NAPALM

Nautical doom commanders dive back into the abyss

Jules Verne's 1870 novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* and Disney's 1954 movie were brilliant adventure masterpieces, but Ahab's own take is just as intense. As with the German band's previous interpretations of Herman Melville and William Hope Hodgson books, their fifth album is grandiose yet intimate, beautiful yet often desperately ugly. A dark tale about a solitary fight against humanity's appetite for destruction, *The Coral Tombs* is a 66-minute journey capable not only of keeping listeners on their toes with 10-minute-plus dirges, but also of intertwining some of the most devastating doom possible with touching and delicate melodic outbursts. Full of savvy arrangements, it's as momentous as the Kraken attacking the Nautilus.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Evoken, Funeral, Tyranny

OLIVIER BADIN



...AND OCEANS *As In Gardens, So In Tombs*

SEASON OF MIST

Finnish black metal explorers continue to cross boundaries

Since 1989, ...And Oceans' core members have refused to settle down, instead repeatedly disbanding and reuniting this band and side-projects Havoc Unit and Festerday. Perhaps that's why 2020 comeback *Cosmic World Mother* flew

ALBUM REVIEWS

under the radar, despite being fucking excellent. Fortunately, *As In Gardens...* doubles down on what made its predecessor so exhilarating: imbuing melodic black metal with symphonic and industrial flourishes. The opening title track affirms that ...And Oceans are adding pages to black metal's bible as it plummets from tremolo-picking to a glitching electronic interlude. By the end of *Third Eye Catalyst*, it's clear AO can get weird without sacrificing their genre's penchant for catharsis.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Dimmu Borgir, Volcandra, Bezebubs

MATT MILLS



ASHEN *Ritual Of Ash*

BITTER LOSS

Australian death metal quartet keep digging for dirt

Ashen's sound hasn't changed too much from their 2021 EP, *Godless Oath*. This debut album is still nestled snugly between vintage Entombed and *Domination*-era Morbid Angel. There's a bit more melody incorporated here, with mixed results; the driving, At The Gates-esque *Buried In Ice* is a highlight, but the less imaginative hook in *Harbinger* falls flat by comparison. While the production is suitably thick, this brand of HM-2 powered death metal always sounds better with loads of dirt under its fingernails, and *Ritual Of Ash* comes across as just a bit too clean.

There's no denying the hefty grooves here, though, and this is still a solid, if generic, debut offering.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Morbid Angel, Bloodbath

KEZ WHELAN



DEFY THE CURSE

Horrors Of Human Sacrifice

HAMMERHEART

Dutch death commandos team up to take on the Swedes

Defy The Curse's 2018 self-titled EP made no secret of their affection for the benchmark-setting, HM-2 pedal-battering 90s Swedish death metal scene, and that love affair has only grown stronger on their inaugural full-length. Boasting former members of Collision, The Guilt Parade and Legion Of The Damned in their ranks, the seasoned four-piece's album is a lean, mean romp down memory lane. Unashamedly worshipping at the altar of Entombed's seminal *Left Hand Path*, the Dutchmen have loaded this 12-track album with crust-flecked, buzzsaw riffs and bullish vocals. The brief but brilliant flirtation with stoner rock on the gloriously groovy *The Tower Of Suffering* is a huge highlight, as is the feral *Existence Consumed*, and they help ensure that *Horrors Of Human Sacrifice* is a killer debut.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Gatecreeper, Napalm Death
EDWIN McFEE



DRYAD

The Abyssal Plain

PROSTHETIC

Crust-infused black metal from the tin mines of Iowa

A historically enduring, divisive, yet wholly justified, criticism of black metal at the raw and unhinged side of the spectrum is how poor

sound quality often crushes the spirit of the songs. Dryad's debut album is the latest paragon of the 'too bad about the sound' debate. Case in point: *Pompeii Worm*. It slinks along under a veil of creepy melodics and mysterious chromatics, but its essence is truncated because it sounds like it was recorded on an ocean floor – perhaps keeping too true to the album's environmental protectionism theme. Same goes for the decidedly more straightforward and vicious *Bottomfeeder* and *Brine Pool Aberration*, both bathing second-wave black metal in crustpunk but, as with much of *The Abyssal Plain*, hits with all the power of an iPhone speaker.

FOR FANS OF: Yellow Eyes, Ash Borer, (early) Mayhem
KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



GUTS CLUB

Cliffs/Walls

SELF-RELEASED

New Orleans trio ratchet up the ruckus with a manifesto of defiance

Plainly bummed out by all the pestilence, bigotry and other attendant bullshit polluting this world, Lindsey Baker has refashioned her mutant country unit, Guts Club, into a pulverising noise-rock trio. It's an outfit sonically equipped to match her militant outlook with its incendiary punch. Beneath the group's twinned electric guitars, spewing their churning malevolence like a pair of lethal fog machines, Lindsey's cryptic lexicons carry the pained howls of her fury. Brutalist cuts such as *The Gun Collector* and *Change My Name* fester in a woozy mirage, conjuring a malformed strain of shoegaze for the irrevocably vexed, as the palpable

solemnity of the lyrics is driven home by Ronna Sandoval's tribalistic tom thumps. *Cliffs/Walls* is both an exorcism and a seizure, convulsing like a cassette copy of Samhain's *November-Coming-Fire* gnawing on its own plastic viscera.

FOR FANS OF: Khanate, The Young Gods, Indian Jewelry
SPENCER GRADY



IMPERIUM DEKADENZ

Into Sorrow Evermore

NAPALM

Teutonic black metallers blend the mercenary with the melody

German black metal duo Imperium Dekadenz continue to hone their distinctively harsh ambience on their seventh album. Heavily inspired by 90s Norwegian black metal, their sound heralds the past, but has an identity of its own. This lies in their ability to combine buzzsaw guitars with abyssal tones and melancholic melodies in tragic yet uplifting unison. *Memories... A Raging River* embodies their introspective style, as floods of harmonised tremolo-picking and emotive beauty go hand in hand with ferocity. It's often the case with bands that infuse their harsher elements with melody that those softer elements eventually dominate. Imperium Dekadenz show no signs of this, staying true to their inspiration and delving ever deeper into their sound. The result is a record with fewer standout moments than previous releases, but plenty of mellifluous misery to wallow in.

FOR FANS OF: Der Weg Einer Freiheit, Primordial, Enslaved

TOM O'BOYLE

Obituary: back in black death



OBITUARY

Dying Of Everything

RELAPSE

Florida's death metal swamp-dwellers get back into their groove

ALTHOUGH CANNIBAL CORPSE

have occasionally been dubbed "the AC/DC of death metal", due to their long-standing adherence to a crowd-pleasing signature style and formula, the appellation surely works better for fellow Florida residents Obituary. One of the genre's best-loved and most successful bands – 1992's *The End Complete* reached the highest placing of any pure death metal band on the UK album chart – they've always incorporated a compulsively headbangable groove into their calculatedly uncomplicated and uncluttered song structures.

"It's easy listening," singer John Tardy declares in the new album's accompanying press release. "You can just enjoy it without having to think too much about it." John's drummer brother (and Andrew WK alumni) Donald adds, "When it comes to songwriting, we've always said, 'Keep it simple, stupid.'"

Also like the Aussie rock legends, Obituary suffered a bit of a mid-career lull – a run of four or five so-so records that satiated the diehards but did little to build on the legacy of their classic early work.

Arguably that slump only started to reverse with 2017's eponymous platter, where the band seemed to rediscover a sense of hunger and urgency. Nearly six years on, no wonder that hunger and urgency is even sharper on this goofily titled 11th album, created and honed into optimum shape during the planet's two-year enforced closedown. Swinging midtempo advance cut *The Wrong Time* boasts the album's dumbest riff, as well as its most flagrant Celtic Frost worship, but killer songs stack up throughout, with more substance and detail than the last LP's smash-and-grab volley. Both records contain 10 tracks, but *Dying Of Everything* is 12 minutes longer, more varied, more considered, more dynamic... and possibly Obituary's strongest album in 30 years.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Celtic Frost, Death
CHRIS CHANTLER





Skáld are prepared to stand out from the pagan folk crowd

SKÁLD

Huldufólk

UNIVERSAL

France's pagan folk phenomenon cover themselves in glory

AMONG THE RAFT of Nordic folk acts to have emerged in Wardruna and Heilung's wake, Skáld are the most curiously overlooked. Curious because they're actually massive: half a million monthly Spotify listeners, playing 3,500-capacity venues and album sales through the turfed roof. And yet you can sense they're not taken as seriously as, or by, their more earnest contemporaries. Ever since their debut album, 2019's *Vikings Chant*, there's been a whiff of opportunism hanging over them – not so much because they hail from the non-Scandic region of Gaul, but perhaps down to their early promo pics looking like a Heathen fashion shoot, some overly obvious plundering of their dual overlords, and their tendency to stray from the Poetic Edda to reinterpret arguably non-canon sources such as Björk and The White Stripes.

With founder Christophe Voisin-Boisvinet now the only original member, Skáld's third album isn't going to assuage the doubters, but it is likely to help them continue their ascent. They aren't alone

in not reaching the rapt, transformative power of either Heilung or Wardruna, no matter how much the female vocals on opener *Troll Kalla Mik* mimic Lindy-Fay Hella, but they're clearly having

a lot of fun. *Troll...* and *Ljósálfur* are a thundering dual salvo, the former sounding like a rolling, oarsman's chant, albeit shamelessly stealing from Wardruna's *Solringen*, its successor a pounding forest rite suggestive of scene precursors Hedningarna.

Countering *Huldufólk's*

more serene moments, the likes of *Ríðum*, *Ríðum* and *Då Månen Sken* have a distinct, identifiable momentum and a knack for both kinetic groove and songcraft that's contagiously accessible in contrast to the over-sobriety so prevalent in their peers. Who among them would dream of turning *Du Hast* and The Cure's *A Forest* into pagan chants? Skáld are charting a brazenly entertaining course of their own.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Wardruna (the less fussy ones), The Hu, Garmarna

JONATHAN SELZER



NACHTMAER

Van De Mare Bereen

THENRA COLLECTIVUM

Belgian black metallers invoke the enthralling stuff of nightmares

Though steeped in BM's second wave, these Belgians have composed four tracks balancing visceral tension and melodic grandeur. Exploring the mythical creatures behind nightmares, each offering is wreathed in an aura of icy malevolence. *Marevlechten* combines ghostly atmospherics with blinding waves of sweep-picking and a blistering percussive onslaught. *Mijn Vlucht Door De Nacht* transforms from a galloping ode to BM's foundational elements into a mesmerising incantation, with vocalist Acharantis unleashing a soaring crescendo of agony. Each track features a different vocalist, but the album's unified by gripping melodies and transcendental rhythms. This is a revelatory journey with layers of emotional devastation countered by moments of staggering beauty.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Gaahls Wyrd, Wintercult, Carpathian Forest

JOE DALY



POLAR

Everywhere, Everything

ARISING EMPIRE

UK's post-hardcore hopefuls expand their toolkit

There's a simplicity of approach on Polar's fifth album balanced by musical depth and a robust edge. The four-piece have a new vitality that surges through

the anthemic *Burn* and *Dissolve Me*. The band's post-hardcore roots remain, but they've developed a new, broader sound with exhilarating anthems that sit alongside introspective interludes, shimmering electronica and ambient soundscapes. Adam Woodford's vocals are dosed with conviction, and the ferocious rhythm section ensures that transfixing melodies are never far behind. Flexing but never over-extending, this is the sound of a re-energised band.

■■■■■■■■■■■

FOR FANS OF: Blood Youth, Wars, Obey The Brave

SOPHIE MAUGHAN



TIDAL WAVE

The Lord Knows

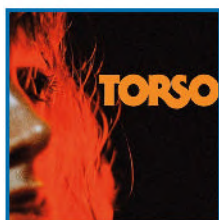
RIPPLE MUSIC

Forward-thinking stoner rock from Sweden's former retro warriors

Tidal Wave went from unrefined retro disciples on their 2019 debut to a more polished execution on this follow-up, *The Lord Knows* – an album full of fuzzy, hard-hitting and melodic stoner-isms. From the off, Jesper Sjödin's versatile noodling, from fuzzy licks to smooth soloing, makes this album pop. Alexander Sundqvist's vocals soar with the prowess of Dio, cutting through the bass-heavy vibrations on arena-filler *Pentagram* and the slow-drip echo chamber *By Order Of The King*. *Lizard King* thumps, *Purple Bird* slow-churns and *Thorsakir* is a smouldering mongrel of Alice In Chains and The Cult. The brilliantly titled *Marijuana Trench* exemplifies an album that, although straightforward, brims with potential.

■■■■■■■■■■■
FOR FANS OF: Orchid, QOTSA, Black Sabbath

HOLLY WRIGHT



TORSO

A Crash Course In Terror

APF

Former Possessor frontman goes all in on the horror

Sludgy London thrashers Possessor called it a day earlier this year, but guitarist/vocalist Graham Bywater is already straight back with his new project. While his love of big doomy riffs and classic horror remains, there's an even more surreal atmosphere here. Sleazy opener *Heads Start To Roll* and the swaggering *Precious Blood* maintain Possessor's raucous, hard rockin' vibe, but the brutish drum machine and sinister synth interludes like *Depth Charge* and *Death TV* lend the album a much more oppressive and macabre tone. At just under half an hour, *A Crash Course In Terror* is over far too soon, but that's perhaps not surprising given that the whole thing was created in one feverish 16-hour session. It's remarkably cohesive considering; if this was just a crash course, sign us up for the full seminar.



FOR FANS OF: *Satan's Satyr's*, *Electric Wizard*, *Torche*

KEZ WHELAN



TURMION KÄTILÖT

Omen X

NUCLEAR BLAST

Finland's disco metal madmen aim to entrance the opposition

Shunning Turmion Kättilöt on account of their disco metal obsession and 'wacky' member names like Master Bates and Shag-U is defensible, but

their credentials aren't to be sniffed at. With a fresh Nuclear Blast contract and a support slot with Nightwish, they have surprisingly considerable clout. On paper, Eurodance tribute *Gabriel* should sound horrible, but after two decades Turmion Kättilöt have perfected their blend of Nordic harshness and thumping beats. *Käy Tanssiin* is another example of where these party metal components fuse for epic effect, culminating in a choir and guitar-aded upsurge. The trancefloor intro on *Sormenjälki* is as infectious as it is naff and the rest of their 10th album is no less ludicrous, but it's as kvlt as party metal gets.



FOR FANS OF: *Rammstein*, *Samael*, *Trollfest*

HOLLY WRIGHT



TWILIGHT FORCE

At The Heart Of Wintervale

NUCLEAR BLAST

Absurdly infectious power metallers pay no heed to the energy crisis

"Less is more? How can that be? It's impossible... more is more." Thus spake Yngwie Malmsteen on the unfamiliar subject of creative self-restraint, coining a dictum that these fellow Swedes have taken to heart. *Twilight Force* have been in the ascendant since their 2014 debut introduced a heroic new voice to the Euro-power metal pantheon, but the sheer giddy hyperactivity of this nevertheless coherent and beautifully arranged fourth album throws down a gauntlet of audacity, eccentricity and intensity that even *Dragonforce* will struggle to retrieve. The band's titular song bursts out of the gate with the astronomical energy levels you might expect from an attention-grabbing

opener. By the uproarious penultimate song *Sunlight Knight* you'll be agog at how every tune since – give or take a folky interlude – has continually ratcheted up the ridiculous exhilaration to the nth degree.



FOR FANS OF: *Rhapsody Of Fire*, *Blind Guardian*, *Dragonforce*

CHRIS CHANTLER



WOTHROSCH

Odium

HAMMERHEART

Brutalist black metal pomp from the Hellenic dimension

Greek black metal has always been utterly distinctive, forged as it is amid the deafening echoes of ancient gods. Shadowy newbies *Wothrosch* demonstrate a clear debt to their native scene's grandiose trademarks, but *Odium* has one foot planted firmly in the sewers of cold reality. With a sound that frequently resembles the unstoppable march of an army of giant killer robots, *Wothrosch* eschew orchestras and empty atmospherics in favour of unabashed pummelling and a festering undercurrent of unearthly turbulence. At times these songs verge on Godflesh-like levels of dogged inhumanity, most notably on the bleak, slow grind of closer *Reign* and the scorched-skin doom hypnosis of *Sinner*. At others, this startling debut filters the frostbitten weirdness of mid-90s Norway through the hyper-wired, curb-stomp battery of *Anaal Nathrakh*. The results are uniformly crushing and bursting at the seams with potential.

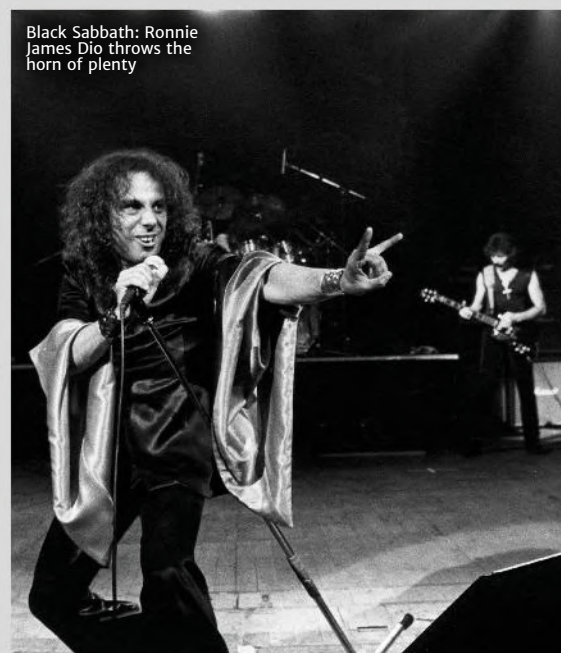


FOR FANS OF: *Triptykon*, *Anaal Nathrakh*, *Behemoth*

DOM LAWSON

RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues



Black Sabbath: Ronnie James Dio throws the horn of plenty

ONE OF MANY peaks in a catalogue with few flaws, *KATATONIA's Dead End Kings* [9] (Peaceville) is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a special, deluxe edition. Those with undamaged hearing can bask in the glory of a new 5.1 Surround Sound mix, while the rest of us can simply marvel at how many gorgeous, unforgettable songs *Katatonian* have on this utterly sublime, stone-cold classic alone.

Speaking of inarguable brilliance, *BLACK SABBATH's* first two albums with the late, great Ronnie James Dio are each receiving the 40th (or thereabouts) anniversary treatment, with lavish, newly remastered versions of the original albums and a generous helping of bonus material. Just to recap, *Heaven And Hell* [10] and *Mob Rules* [10] are two of the greatest records ever made, and it is perfectly acceptable to buy them for the third or fourth time.

As discerning vampires will be aware, *POWERWOLF's* second album is the true starting point for the Germans' inexorable rise. 2005's *Return In Blood* captured the band as a work in progress, but on *Lupus Dei* (Metal Blade) [8] they hit the jackpot with sound-defining anthems like *Saturday Satan* and *In Blood We Trust*. This swanky 15th-anniversary edition adds some fiery demo tracks and, for those who bought it first time around, a well-earned sense of superiority.

A timeless Bay Area thrash classic, *VIO-LENCE's* 1988 debut *Eternal Nightmare* (Metal Blade) [8] is long overdue a re-release, and not just because the band are back out there and wrecking necks all over again. A seminal first studio foray for guitarists Phil Demmel and Robb Flynn, with whom readers will probably be familiar, songs like *Serial Killer* and *Calling In The Coroner* are certified classics that may still compel otherwise sane people to launch themselves off the furniture. Finally, Toronto thrash cult *SACRIFICE* continue their reissue bonanza with third album *Soldiers Of Misfortune* [7]. Built from speed, filth and a dash of Rush-like songcraft, the likes of epic finale *Truth (After The Rain)* have weathered well.

DOM LAWSON

LIVE REVIEWS

WITHIN TEMPTATION / EVANESCENCE

VERIDIA

FIRST DIRECT ARENA, LEEDS

Symphonic and alt metal titans finally bring the manna for the faithful

THREE YEARS. THAT'S how long the faithful have waited for this moment. The Internet lost its shit when Within Temptation and Evanescence – two bands who have blazed parallel paths, emerging in the early 00s to become figureheads for their respective scenes – announced their Worlds Collide tour back in late 2019. After four postponements, there's a sense the fans who have shown up in their droves for early doors still can't quite believe tonight's show is actually happening.

Up first, though, Nashville's **VERIDIA** are a well-pitched opener who veer between alt rock and anthemic pop sensibilities. Vocalist Deena Jakoub has a penchant for theatrics that goes down well as she spins across the stage between blazing orange wings, but it's when Evanescence's Amy Lee turns up to play piano on *I'll Never Be Ready* that the energy in the room uncoils like a taut spring.

EVANESCENCE have only released four albums proper since they broke through in 2003 with their nu goth, world-eating debut, *Fallen*, but the emotional refuge that frontwoman Amy provided back then for millions of teenagers has endured. Of course, this isn't the first time the Arkansas alt veterans have played these shores in recent years, but the breathless reverence that greets Amy as she steps out onto a raised platform for cobwebby opener *Broken Pieces Shine*, and scream-alongs that rip through the crowd, suggest many here are still living out an adolescent fever dream. Even Amy seems humbled by the reaction as she surveys the packed arena. "Look at you all," she marvels. "Thank you so much for coming down so early."

Throughout the set, the band hold that nostalgia at arm's length, giving fans what they want with the classics



Within Temptation: Sharon den Adel takes the crowd through the Stargate

THE SETS

WITHIN TEMPTATION

See Who I Am
Faster
Paradise (What About Us?)
Angels
Stand My Ground
Raise Your Banner
In The Middle Of The Night
All I Need
The Reckoning
Supernova
What Have You Done
Don't Pray For Me
Ice Queen
Mother Earth

EVANESCENCE

Broken Pieces Shine
Made Of Stone
Take Cover
Going Under
Lacrymosa
Lose Control / Part Of Me / Never Go Back
Far From Heaven
Your Star
End Of The Dream
Better Without You
Call Me When You're Sober
Imaginary
Use My Voice
Blind Belief
My Immortal
Bring Me To Life

– *Call Me When You're Sober*, *Going Under* and the rarely played *Lacrymosa* – while the bulk of the set is made up of new material from last year's *The Bitter Truth*. Playing among purple lights under a huge triangular screen, that makes the set feel like it's being beamed from under the arches of a giant cathedral, the show feels fittingly majestic and gothic, while the sound is bass-heavy and beefy, as every hulking riff rattles the guts.

Even so, as huge visuals loom over her, Amy's haunting, husky voice is the focal point. Still as much a revelation as it was when we first heard it, it merges gloriously with the harmonious vocals of new bassist Emma Anzai on the Alice In Chains-like *Take Cover*. She scales the sublime peaks of *Far From Heaven* and the transcendental *My Immortal* as a grand piano rises from the floor. It's left to *Bring Me To Life*, the song that turned them into megastars, to close out a dark, powerful and emotional set.

Although Evanescence and **WITHIN TEMPTATION** have been alternating the headline slot over the course of the tour, it's the latter who are packing the kind of production that feels impossible to follow. As lights burst to life in a galaxy of red, blue and purple, the Dutch symphonic powerhouses take to the stage flanked by flashing screens and a huge humanoid head. Tearing into

a choir-clad *See Who I Am*, with vocalist Sharon den Adel all smiles and decked out in gold and a celestial headdress, it's an immediate sensory overload.

With that in mind, in a bizarre turn of events, it's galling that a sizeable portion of the crowd up and leave after Evanescence's set. We're later told by fans at the venue and on social media that a balls-up of communication led punters to believe Amy and co were the headliner and what a travesty that is, because this is a WT show for the ages. While the CGI that the band's 2021 pandemic livestream, *Aftermath*, leaned heavily upon didn't always hold pace with their vision, as tonight's set progresses, there's a sense that finally, the band's limitless ambition has been visually realised. This is a set that truly charts Within Temptation's evolution, from fantastical symphonic maestros to arena mainstays. The memorable moments come thick and fast, from Sharon singing the bombastic *Angels* on top of the humanoid head, to the blasts of pyro during *Stand My Ground*, to a powerful declaration of solidarity during *Raise Your Banner*, which Sharon dedicates to Ukraine, defiantly waving the blue and yellow flag.

Later, for a gorgeous *All I Need*, she's suspended on a hoop above the stage, draped in billowing folds of red and backed by swirling rivers of blue and green. WT have been building up to this level for some time now, but this is proof that they've had the material to own rooms this size all along. While electronic juggernauts *Supernova* and the dubstep-infused *The Reckoning* detonate against the ornate sparkle of *Ice Queen*, closer *Mother Earth* ends the evening with fountains of flame and a storm of orchestral excess. Tonight may have been three years in the making, but it really has been worth the wait.

DANNII LEIVERS

Evanescence: Amy Lee makes a spectacular landing in Leeds



Sharon den Adel: imperial and triumphant



Tonight, Matthew, Perturbator are going to be agents of the apocalypse



PERTURBATOR

HEALTH

ELECTRIC BRIXTON, LONDON

Synthwave's dark avenger keeps the party spirit going

JUDGING BY THE queue at the merch stand, there are at least as many people here to see LA's **HEALTH** as the headliners. Kudos to France's Perturbator for giving their support to a full production on these shows, as Health's lightshow is dazzling. Bathed in a cool, electric blue glow, the trio emerge with the songs to back it up. Theirs is a constantly swirling amalgam of industrial, metal and shoegaze that turns Electric Brixton into a scene reminiscent of that nightclub from the beginning of *Blade*. Thankfully without blood dripping down the walls.

It's partly an eagerness to collaborate that puts the band in such rude, er, health, as evidenced by their last two full-length collaborative efforts, *Disco4 :: Part I & II*, on which a certain Mr. James Kent appears (twice). He strides out to help Health on their last song, a rousing rendition of *Excess* from *Disco4 :: Part II*, which provides the highlight of the entire evening.

After that astonishing display, the two members of **PERTURBATOR** come on through the centre of their monolithic stage set, which to English eyes looks like the set

for ITV's *Stars In Their Eyes* given a Satanic makeover. A silhouetted James Kent acts simultaneously as hype man, guitarist and synth player, while Dylan Hyard's precision tub-thumping provides a neon-drenched apocalyptic backbeat. Even the lighting guy is earning his keep, furiously triggering LEDs in time to the pulsating synth throb.

And it's fun, albeit on a superficial level. Once the novelty of the monolithic set and synced lights wears off, you're left with two very capable silhouetted musicians and a whole heap of backing tracks. It's difficult not to imagine how much harder songs such as *Death Of The Soul* or *Dethroned Under A Funeral Haze* would hit with a full band, but as is, the Perturbator live show is an apocalyptic spectacle to dance your ass off to, and the vast majority of Electric Brixton oblige willingly.

Whether Perturbator's desire to shed the synthwave tag is successful or not still remains to be seen, but at present, he clearly has more than enough devotees too busy losing their shit to care.

REMFREY DEDMAN

BRUTUS

GHOST WOMAN

THE GARAGE, LONDON

"Trouble comes in threes. So does Brutus."

So reads the Belgian rock trio's social media bio and, wrapping up the UK leg of their tour for latest album, *Unison Life*, they show why that is with a riveting, near-perfect performance. First, **GHOST WOMAN** enthrall with their noise-tinged dark country, even if their stage patter is a little lifeless. In stark contrast, **BRUTUS** are wondrously life-affirming. Bursting into action with *Liar*, they're mesmerising from the start. A trio they may be, but all eyes are on drummer/vocalist Stefanie Mannaerts, whether she's battering the drums, belting out emotionally fraught melodies or, more frequently, both together. The cheer that greets *War* is second only to the pit it incites, the song sounding even more gargantuan than its recorded counterpart, before strobing lights accentuate *Miles Away*'s gorgeous dynamics. Every ounce of energy is poured out through an emotionally draining performance. They've made a career from poignant post-rock, folding in post-hardcore, post-metal and even blastbeats, and every emotion is heightened live with an immaculate mix. A spellbinding performance showcasing why so many love them.

WILL MARSHALL

SIKTH

PALM READER

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Tonight, **Sikth** celebrate their 20th anniversary as a band by reforming their classic line-up and playing a fan-picked set. Support **PALM READER** prove once more that they're one of the UK's most underrated bands. It's all wonderful, but songs from 2020's career-high *Sleepless* sound particularly monolithic. It's mad to think that some of the songs **SIKTH** perform tonight are two decades old. The djent and tech-metal scene that blossomed in their wake still hasn't been able to recapture the manic, wide-eyed, catchy and intense aura of still fresh-sounding songs like *Pussyfoot* and *Hold My Finger*. **Sikth**, sitting somewhere between Korn at their grooviest and The Dillinger Escape Plan at their most unpredictable, have a unique energy, especially with Justin Hill's return on vocals. But their ace card remains his vocal partner Mikee Goodman, who has a voice and presence that is truly unique: part Killing Joke's Jaz Coleman, part Chino Moreno, he's a man of a thousand voices, and when the Electric Ballroom barks back his spoken-word piece *When Will The Forest Speak...?* you can see just how deeply their fans connect with him. Twenty years on, **Sikth** remain truly distinctive.

STEPHEN HILL

Nightwish: Finally onstage, and celebrating life



NIGHTWISH

BEAST IN BLACK / TURMION KÄTILÖT

SSE WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON

Finland's symphonic world-beaters make a cathartic return to Wembley

IT'S A GOOD night to be a fan of Finnish metal. Eccentric purveyors of disco-metal **TURMION KÄTILÖT** are on fine form and smash the language barrier by affably clowning about while they rip through danceable songs from the upcoming *Omen X*, closing with the industrial-flavoured *Sikiö*. Continuing the party vibe are the flamboyant power metallers **BEAST IN BLACK**, who, from the very first strains of opener *Blade Runner*, pepper their performance with choreographed guitar-lift moves, synchronised headbanging and timed jumps. It's a bit OTT, but songs like the gloriously silly *One Night In Tokyo* do a great job of loosening fans up for the main event.

And what an event it is when **NIGHTWISH** make their return to the Wembley stage, nearly a year later than planned. Following the painful pandemic years, as well as frontwoman Floor Jansen's very recent successful cancer surgery, tonight's show feels especially poignant. As the band kick off with the scathing *Noise*, we're instantly reminded why the Finnish symphonic metal masters belong in an arena. They're surrounded by

screens displaying tranquil David Attenborough-esque visuals and nightmarish dancing skeletons; massive pyrotechnics punctuate heavy renditions of *Tribal* and old favourite *Dark Chest Of Wonders*; and yet they still know how to create an intimate atmosphere. When Troy Donockley accompanies Floor for an acoustic performance of *How's The Heart?*, it feels like we're at a cosy hearth listening to his amiable Northern patter. Even Tuomas Holopainen's most earnest, wide-eyed songs like *Harvest* don't interrupt the set's momentum, because all the players are 100% onboard with his vision. The chemistry between them all onstage is palpably warm and joyful.

Floor appears to be on top of the world, twirling to the upbeat pipe melody of *I Want My Tears Back* with elation as she runs the gamut of power and emotion with her exceptional voice unwavering, from the



Turmion Kätilöt get the crowd in the right headspace



Beast In Black roar into action

key change in gorgeous ballad *Sleeping Sun* to her eye-watering ad-libs at the end of *Ghost Love Score*. By the end of *The Greatest Show On Earth*, which she describes – fittingly – as a “celebration of life”, something feels like it's been released. Not just the snow-like confetti from its cannons, but the tension of the last three years as the whole arena sings out, “*We were here!*” in one big unifying, cathartic moment, before it's finally time to step off the ride.

CATHERINE MORRIS

In Flames: Anders Fridén keeps the crowd connected



IN FLAMES

AT THE GATES / IMMINENCE / ORBIT CULTURE

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Gothenburg's twin melodeath pioneers offer up a feast for the faithful

THE PAIRING OF two Swedish melodeath pioneers feels like a dream tour, especially with reports circulating that headliners In Flames are reaching for their older material that many fans see as their best. **ORBIT CULTURE** provide the first support with their Metallica-meets-Gojira racket. An anaemic, sometimes murky mix hampers their sound, but not enough to obscure their musical quality. **IMMINENCE** fare even worse, the drums overpowering their violin-led modern metalcore with the vocals rendered almost inaudible. Frustratingly, it doesn't get better, and any nuance or draw their songs might have is almost totally lost.

AT THE GATES are fresh off celebrating their landmark album *Slaughter Of The Soul* at Damnation festival, so tonight's set features more than a few choice cuts, including the requisite title track that follows rampaging opener *Spectre Of Extinction*. Reunion album *At War With Reality* also gets a look-in, though their latest two albums only get a single track each. No matter, though, as the atmosphere is electric and the front rows mosh incessantly. Tomas Lindberg commands the crowd with ease whether tearing through *To Drink From*



The Night Itself or furious closer *The Night Eternal*. It's a masterclass in melodeath from a legendary band that defined the genre and are still finding new ways to push themselves.

The rumours of **IN FLAMES** focusing on older material turn out to be bang on the money, and with the more melodeath-leaning singles they've brought out the big guns to back it up. *The Great Deceiver* from new album *Foregone* opens the set, but it's followed by a string of hits no more recent than 2006's *Come Clarity*. *Pinball Map* incites a huge singalong, and the crowd are putty from hereon in, especially after it's followed by a skyscraping *Cloud Connected*.

Anders Fridén is on fine form between songs too, declaring, "I hope you leave with a smile on your face, and if you don't then fuck you!" before ensuring people will do just that with 1994's *Behind Space*. The band put nary a foot wrong, though a mid-set *Wallflower* threatens to derail what's been a runaway success thus far. But, by sprinkling their recent singles through a heavier set and closing on the majestic, vicious *Take This Life*, they prove there's plenty more ferocity in these Swedes yet.

WILL MARSHALL

SAXON

DIAMOND HEAD

ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON

The prestigious Roundhouse has seen many iconic artists through its Grade II-listed doors. **DIAMOND HEAD**, cited by Metallica and Iron Maiden as an early influence, are opening for Saxon for the second time this year after January's anniversary celebration, and they rattle through a short set of traditional power-tinged heavy metal culminating in the iconic *Am I Evil?* Vocalist Rasmus Bom Andersen admits he's not at his best due to illness, though the energy from the crowd helps prop them up. **SAXON**'s set draws heavily on their last album, including the opening title track and *Living To The Limit*, dedicated to Biff Byford's son. They're a classic example of a band not fixing what isn't broken and while the production isn't extravagant, the light-studded stairs and plumes of backlit smoke complement them well. Saxon know their formula and stick to it, but their fans are happy, offering mass singalongs, raucous cheers and even crowdsurfers during *Wheels Of Steel*. On top of all this, the fact that tonight's show is being filmed goes down a storm with fans. If you want all heavy metal, all the time, Saxon deliver.

WILL MARSHALL

THE SUN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE NIGHT

UNDERDARK

229, LONDON

Before the much-anticipated arrival of the headliners, Nottingham's **UNDERDARK** start proceedings impressively. The members have all played in bands of a variety of different styles prior to the formation of this project, and you can hear the clear influence of indie, goth and post-punk seeping heavily into their take on black metal. The result is searingly heavy, but also beautifully elegant. Very promising. **THE SUN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE NIGHT** don't appear to have as much interest in subtleties. From their look – all members cloaked and covered up, and vocalist No One's identity obscured by a crown and skull – to the hyper-energetic, relentless blasting they serve up, this is a dramatic onslaught. And from the anticipative air prior to their arrival and the chaos in the pit once they get going, it's clear that they've made a serious connection with their fans, with a few members of the crowd constantly reaching out to touch No One as he lurches back and forth. If they can continue to add to both the theatrics and the viciousness of their music, we could be witnessing the start of a very interesting cult band here.

STEPHEN HILL

AMORPHIS / ELUVEITIE

DARK TRANQUILLITY / NAILED TO OBSCURITY

02 ACADEMY BRIXTON, LONDON

Folk-tinged melodeath co-headliners weather mixed fortunes

NAILED TO OBSCURITY is an ironic name for a band so signposted for stardom. By cramming the miserable melodies of later Katatonia in between the death-doom grandeur of... early Katatonia, the German quintet easily woo a rapidly filling Brixton Academy. Factor in a shimmering mix, a frontman who sings as mightily as he growls and the fact that the newest songs are their tightest to date, and London has future headliners on its hands. Conversely, **DARK TRANQUILLITY** use their 45 minutes to honour a pioneering past. *Atoma* and *Misery's Crown* affirm that not only are the six-piece masters of melodeath, but that imbuing the genre with goth rock is a recipe for bangers. The pit responds with circling and singalongs. Even when deep cuts such as *Cathode Ray Sunshine* and *Hours Passed In Exile* show up, they garner a reaction. Given these Swedes' significance and the euphoria that meets them, playing second of four is an insult.

ELUVEITIE are metal's greatest nine-piece who aren't willing to push their fingers into their eyes – thank fuck, since their Celtic cosplaying lends more than enough visual stimulation by itself. The kilts and robes are complemented by an array of harps, flutes and bagpipes, while each member instigating movement during their downtime makes this set as physically demanding as a Pilates class. The frills don't distract from the triumphant songwriting, though. Mega-hit *The Call Of The Mountains* is a case in point. When Fabienne Erni howls the hook, it's quickly picked up by the 5,000 acolytes in front of her. Ultimately, Eluveitie are such a draw that the crowd thins as soon as they're done – and **AMORPHIS** don't seem fussed about retaining those left, either.

Tonight's co-headliners have amassed a catalogue of progressive anthems. *Black Winter Day* and *Silver Bride* sound as infectious as ever, and it's a testament to the tracks pulled from this year's *Halo* that they stand shoulder to shoulder with the classics. However, there's no ceremony to the Finns' show, as they perform with all the verve most bands bring to a rehearsal. Each player is rooted to the spot and staring downwards, while frontman Tomi Joutsen hides behind his mic stand, armed with only the shallowest banter. Instead of rising to the challenge of a shrinking audience, Amorphis hunker down into autopilot.

MATT MILLS



Amorphis: Tomi Joutsen makes a rare foray from his mic stand

Eluveitie:
a class act



Poppy: angelic
with an edge



POPPY

WITCH FEVER

02 INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

Boston's genre-stirring crossover queen heats the cauldron to boiling point

WITH HUGE HOOKS, headbanging tempos and sufficient fuzz to thrill any stoner rock aficionado, **WITCH FEVER**'S unapologetic brand of fuck-you energy and surrealist lyrical imagery makes them a powerful act to witness live. Amy Walpole's passionate, gravel-laced vocals are as empowering as they are captivating. *I Saw You Dancing* and *Reincarnate* see the Mancunian doom punks punching the patriarchy in the face with seething aplomb, as ominous basslines and grinding riffs fuse to create an air of menace.

It's been a long journey for musical shapeshifter **POPPY**. From going viral with a cotton-candy ASMR video to the scintillating blend of 90s alt rock and daydream pop on 2021's *Flux*, tonight's performance is no different in its hair-raising crescendo of contrasts, feeling like a playful representation of a post-genre world in which anyone can be anything.

Decked out in a translucent white dress, black clompy boots and with all flowing hair, she sits somewhere between high priestess and haute couture, and the ensuing furore is akin to disciples welcoming back their leader. Deftly working the crowd into a wide-eyed frenzy, the vicious pop-punk of *Lessen The Damage* sounds like Paramore with harsh vocals, while *Bloodmoney*'s throbbing electro-spliced beats

and vitriol-soaked delivery prove irresistible. With Poppy picking up a guitar, *Pocket* and *Her* veer between unhinged shrieks and empowering choruses, before an anthemic *Flux* – which fuses 80s industrial bombast with grunge – raises the roof via its clatter of melody and chaotic screams.

Interaction is kept to a minimum, but there's still plenty to shout about here, not least that cover of t.A.T.u.'s oos banger *All The Things She Said*. The manic pace slows briefly to make way for the hazy, warping guitars and dreamy drones of *Hysteria* and *As Strange As It Seems*, their My Bloody Valentine-esque influences proving to be gently intoxicating, but the eardrum-battering riffs and guttural wails are never far behind.

A stomping encore of *I Disagree* and *Bite Your Teeth* instigates another bout of chaos, as the former's curdled riffing of nu metal and industrial noise collides with angelic shouts of 'Let it all burn down / Burn it to the ground' before chugging guitars twist and turn among a slew of distorted screams and metalcore-infused breakdowns. This is the sonic equivalent of razor blades hidden in candy apples, and a melting pot of sounds that makes for a thrilling live experience.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

RIVERS OF NIHIL

FALLUJAH / ALLEGAEON / INFERI / HARBINGER

THEKLA, BRISTOL

A tour grandly billed 'Faces Of Death' brings with it certain connotations. While all five bands tonight boast the DNA of the genre's pioneers, it's testament to how multifaceted death metal has become in its near-40-year lifespan that such progressive and melodically minded acts are heralded as flagbearers rather than curiosities.

The twin pressures of being the sole Brits and a set commencing before 6pm does little to faze **HARBINGER**. The Londoners' pummelling deathcore is the bluntest implement of the night, but is wielded with such fiendish intent it serves as the ideal aperitif. **INFERI**'s mazy melodeath bridges the gap, with the catchy, ruthless fundamentals going down a treat before flamboyant flourishes pave the way for what comes next.

Such is the pedigree of latest album *Damnum* that **ALLEGAEON** can hold their own in terms of both dazzling technicality and forward-thinking sophistication. While *Into Embers* contains the same melodic noodling as crowd-favourite 1.618, the imaginative expanse of the former transports them into giddier realms. **FALLUJAH** are almost unrecognisable since their last visit to these shores. Flanked by two touring musicians, all eyes are on new frontman Kyle Schaefer as he confidently delivers the goods from latest effort *Empyrean* and puts his own stamp on the likes of *Carved From Stone*. As ever, it's Andrew Baird's drumming that lays a commanding platform for Scott Carstairs' compelling textures and explorations.

RIVERS OF NIHIL's transformation is even more recent, with frontman Jake Dieffenbach departing since their appearance at nearby Arctangent just a few months ago. Being a man down has changed the dynamic for the better, with bassist and lyricist Adam Biggs now on lead vocals and giving everything of himself. It's particularly pertinent with the set dominated by last year's exceptional *The Work*, and Adam's personal explorations being examined through the devastating *More?* and the poise and passion of *Episode*. Former Black Crown Initiate man Andy Thomas plays a larger role, deftly playing off Adam, drummer Jared Klein and Brody Uttley, whose Gilmour-esque leads make for the most hypnotic and gratifying of encounters. While it's always disappointing when Zach Strouse isn't accompanying on saxophone, seeing Rivers Of Nihil evolve and excel despite hindrances proves their place in death metal's vanguard is deserved.

ADAM BRENNAN



Powerwolf fondly recall the early days of black metal

POWERWOLF

WARKINGS

ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON

Germany's bombastic power metallers fuse the lycanthropic and the lysergic

THE ROUNDHOUSE TURNS

into Hades tonight as Powerwolf perform in an avalanche of flames and pyrotechnics on a level not seen since Rammstein. It's a lot to live up to for support act **WARKINGS**, but they don't disappoint with their warrior shtick. Opening with a thundering *The Last Battle* and *Spartacus*, complete with crowd chants, they get straight into the job of entertaining. It doesn't really matter that harsh vocalist Secil Sen, aka Morgana le Fay, makes a guest appearance, because the real flair comes from born-to-do-this frontman Georg Neuhauser, of Serenity fame. The final note-hold on *Fight* – a song peeled from the Italian protest anthem *Bella Ciao* – is a breathtaking marker of the singer's superlative vocal work, proving to be the set smasher.

Warkings are the perfect warm-up for **POWERWOLF**. Having made a considerable ascent in recent years,

flitting between a werewolf-obsessed novelty act and a genuinely credible prospect, tonight feels like the German power metallers are reaching cult status. Bedecked in ghoulish facepaint and ecclesiastical garb, the band, accompanied by six monks brandishing flames, enter a stage resembling a decaying churchyard. In the background a hyper-realistic projection displays a portcullis and, later, 3D depictions of their beloved werewolf muse that ripple and roar to the rhythm of the songs. It's all highly impressive.

They fittingly open with *Faster Than The Flame* as the stage puffs out consecutive streams of face-melting fire. Attila Dorn grabs the mic and the crowd rejoice, thrusting their fists in the air. The brisk rendition of *Amen & Attack* is accompanied by keyboardist Falk Maria Schlegel parading a pyrotechnic flag, while *Dancing With*

The Dead – introduced by Falk and Attila mock-waltzing – sees the frontman dishing out more of his incisive humour. By now Powerwolf have honed their crowd participation tactics to a tee, making no apologies for the overuse of their gimmicks on moments like the Iron Maiden-esque singalong for *Armata Strigoi* and an audience duel before thundering closer *Werewolves Of Armenia*. But when it's all this much fun, all cheap shots are welcome.

Over a decade ago, when Powerwolf were playing pokey venues in corpsepaint to power metal freaks, it didn't feel like a sell-out show at the Roundhouse would be on the cards, but hard work has a funny way of paying off. And perhaps the omission of setlist staple *Resurrection By Erection* is symbolic of a band who have come of age in bombastic form.

HOLLY WRIGHT



He's Spartacus!
No, he's Spartacus!
No, he's...

Opeth's forward-thinking Mikael Åkerfeldt embraces the nostalgia



OPETH VOIVOD

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON

Sweden's prog/death masters retrace three decades of adventure

AT FIRST GLANCE, VOIVOD's warped, angular future-thrash seems like an odd choice of support for a band long celebrated for the warmth and fluidity of their sound. But if you're drawn to the creation of fully fledged, sprawling worlds where anything can happen, the Canadians are the OGs. As they launch into *Experiment* – still as urgent and bewildering nearly 35 years down the line – their wayward, careering momentum never lets up. Amid *Synchro Anarchy*'s jabs, tempo-lurches, riffs like woozy sirens and drummer Away's 70s stomp percussion, frontman Snake embodies the adrenaline-drunk nature of the music, the ever-shifting, hard-edged dynamics akin to being chased through a steel maze as the drugs start to kick in.

Considering Mikael Åkerfeldt's ambivalent relationship to OPETH'S back catalogue, the decision to celebrate their 30th anniversary – plus time added on for Covid – with a fan-voted, one-track-per-each-of-their-13-albums set might have come across as merely dutiful. But it's immediately clear that the approach is one of rediscovery, for band and audience alike. The sense of occasion is electric, sparked into outright euphoria when a delicate cadence launches *Ghost Of Perdition*'s titanic, searching main riff before three layers of video screen



Voivod: avant-metal OGs

("They aren't that expensive") line up to give the impression of the band floating amid a sea of fire. Mikael relates the stories behind many of the songs, but also the naivety that gave rise to their creation, yet everyone is fully in the moment as *Demon Of The Fall* erupts like a pyroclastic cloud, and *Eternal Rains Will Come*'s proggy jostling resolves into rich pastoralism and Mikael's gaze-beyond-the-horizon croon.

Harvest and *Windowpane* are awash in wanderlust and delirium-inducing nostalgia, and if there's a danger that songs will lose some of the context that was intended, tonight still feels like being led on a multi-sensory journey. That goes even more so for the full 20 minutes of *Morningrise's Black Rose Immortal*, its blackened opening screed giving way to jaunty folk, twin-lead expanses and acoustic interludes – a one-off live experience, like glimpsing through a fissure in their timeline to vast reaches beyond. Later track *Alting Tar Slut* is proof of how boundless Opeth's vision remains, but the rolling contours of a closing *Deliverance*, shot through with Mikael's still-impressive death growls, is a perfect summation of the organic, meticulously tended rapture that remains their calling card.

JONATHAN SELZER

VÁGTÁZÓ HALOTTKÉMEK

THE UNDERWORLD

As cult bands go, you'd be hard pressed to find one who fits the bill to quite the same extent as Hungary's VÁGTÁZÓ HALOTTKÉMEK, aka Galloping Coroners. Formed in 1975 from a heady brew of then-nascent punk, folklore, paganism and spiritual fervour, they've since been banned by the Communist government, spied on by secret services, and created some of the most enrapturing, liberating music of the past five decades. They're the underground's best-kept secret, but for London's Hungarians, who make up pretty much the entire audience, tonight is a dream come true and a Bacchanalian celebration. The still ridiculously young-looking founder Attila Grandpierre is the only original member, but everyone onstage, and off, is locked into the band's shamanically dressed dynamo and the ecstatic energy unleashed. Musicians hang from the ceiling as the chaotic opening summoning gradually coheres into ritualistic, crust-ridden riffs, pounding tribal grooves and East European vibes all revving up to optimum, lose-your-shit abandon. By the time they launch into *Hunok Csatája*, a pounding, call-and-response, ever-expanding invocation, everyone's universe has been entirely remapped.

JONATHAN SELZER

ZETRA

ALLSIAH / GRAYWAVE

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Tinsel may be hanging in The Black Heart, but GRAYWAVE want your Christmas to be as merry as seasonal depression. Even though the oceans of echo drown out the nuances of their guitar playing, it doesn't stop Jess Webberley's croon from breaking hearts. Drone metal duo ALLSIAH can't deal with all that fluffy bollocks. Instead, the pair drag us into a hellscape of muddy chords, uninterrupted by percussion of any sort. As cacophonous as the noise that swallows the venue is, the ceaselessly sluggish riffing and unending songs make this half-hour feel made up as it goes along. Mercifully, minutes into ZETRA's set, it's obvious that this duo plan all they do with microscopic scrutiny. They're facepainted and stand with apocalyptic imagery on screens behind them as ever, yet for their headliner they've also tapped two dancers. A pub gig with spectacle! Voiceovers between anthems establish the battle-blitzed universe Zetra are creating, fitting the solemnity of their synthrock, but there's still energy in the digitised drumbeats and smooth singalongs. For the time being, the conceptual narrative being sown still has gaping holes, yet it feels like every Zetra gig is a tantalising glimpse into a larger, expansive vision.

MATT MILLS

The Hu: Jaya takes Cardiff on an amazing journey



THE HU

KING NUN

THE GREAT HALL, CARDIFF

Mongolia's folk metal phenomenon hits a universal resonance in Wales

GIVEN THE EXTREME niche that the headliners inhabit, it's challenging to think of a band capable of acting as suitable support – a problem highlighted by the diverse range of musical subcultures on display in tonight's sold-out crowd. As such it's not **KING NUN**'s fault that their noisy garage rock seems totally misplaced and garners little more than polite applause. Not that this fazes the south-west London gang one jot, with frontman Theo Polyzoides in particular exuding supreme confidence and an aloof air that's more admirable than annoying. As soon as they're finished, the pleasantries give way to the "Hu!" war chant that continues unprompted throughout the rest of the evening.

If there's a perplexed minority who still need convincing of **THE HU**'s popularity, they need look no further than the feverish reception the band

receive on their first Welsh visit – particularly the connection created as the guitar-led stomp of *Shihi Hutu* kicks off the ceremony. The songs from this year's *Rumble Of Thunder* certainly do a much better job of bridging the band's traditional Mongolian instrumentation with well-worn rock and metal motifs, but the live environment is where any notion that The Hu are a flash-in-the-pan gimmick is soundly banished.

The touring musicians on the recognisable instruments have a lot to do with this, but more so is the sheer presence of core members Gala, Enkush, Temka and Jaya. As the former pair summon evocative melodies from their morin khuurs with virtuosic flair and no small dose of extravagant body movement, Jaya is every bit the scene-stealing rock frontman, showing off his extraordinary throat singing while effortlessly commanding the crowd.



Gala is a morin khuur wizard

It's also his gorgeous tsuur flute-playing on the poignant *Shireg Shireg* that breaks up a set that flits between epic narratives and rambunctious dance-alongs. The latter are served by Yuve Yuve Yu and the irresistible frivolity of *Bii Biyelgee*, while the traditional drums give an atmospheric thrum to *The Great Chinggis Khaan* and gargantuan reverberation of *Tatar Warrior* that bring the tales of the Steppe to South Wales.

Of course, *Wolf Totem* leads to fervent scenes before an encore of *Sad But True* sees one of metal's most identifiable riffs given a welcoming, idiosyncratic rebrand. Tonight is a celebration that proves The Hu's attraction goes beyond curiosity and goodwill, conjuring songs and a spirit that forge a primal bond with zealous followers in a newly conquered fiefdom.

ADAM BRENNAN



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We understand your new album is the culmination of a trilogy...

"Yeah, starting with *God Has Nothing To Do With This* *Leave Him Out Of It* to *I Lie Here Buried With My Rings And My Dresses* and this new album, *His Happiness Shall Come First Even Though We Are Suffering*, is the culmination of me going back and back in time. This one takes me back to my earliest memories and ends there. I like to compare albums to movies, the sequencing and pacing. This is like the end of a horror franchise when they close the door on the protagonist and they can move on."

So is it a happy ending?

"Relatively happy, yeah! Even though you're still living in the hellscape you have fond memories of where you came from."

What's the next chapter going to look like?

"I don't know, I haven't thought about it yet. I don't think it'll be me talking about my own personal experiences, though. When it comes to this section of my life, this is essentially everything I have to say. The soundscape and the content has to be different... but that doesn't mean it's going to be happy, bright guitars!"

We were delighted to see Pupil Slicer appear on the new record!

"Yeah! I like the band, especially Katie [Davies] as a vocalist, I was a fan. I had this beat I created and it kinda reminded me of mathcore – the textures and the bounce. I sent it to Pupil Slicer and they sent back this hook, and when I wrote the verses it all just blended together. I'm a fan of them as a band and as people."

You've done some amazing collabs – who would be top of the pile for you to work with next?

"That's a tough one! I'm now addicted to doing my own instrumentation, so I would do that, but it's hard to know when you haven't made the music yet! You have to wait for the music to speak to you... but... my dream collaboration is Trent Reznor and Danny Brown."

"YOU'RE STILL LIVING IN THE HELLSCAPE, BUT WITH FOND MEMORIES"

FIVE MINUTES WITH

ASHANTI MUTINTA BACKXWASH

The trap metal pioneer talks horror movies, dream collabs and history's greatest trilogies

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

You've made an album trilogy now, but, in your opinion, what is the greatest trilogy ever made in any artistic medium?

"That's a good question! I mean, *The Godfather* is pretty damn perfect but that is such a regular answer. So many people say that! This is a tough question!"

It's always the third one that lets them down! Look at *Aliens* or *Back To The Future*!

"Ha ha! It's so true! Same with *The Matrix* as well! I really like the first two, but I'm not sweet on the third one... it's difficult to pinpoint!"

Well, your third instalment is amazing, maybe the best of the three. So maybe it is you!

"Ha ha ha! Well, thank you! I'm honoured! I'm actually curious to hear *The Weeknd*'s trilogy as well, so I'll say that."

You've always had long album titles. Are there any you think are too long?

"Yes! *The Fiona Apple* one [2012's *The Idler Wheel Is Wiser Than The Driver Of The Screw And Whipping Chords Will Serve You More Than Ropes Will Ever Do*!] That's really long! But I like them long; I don't need things short and sweet."

You had two songs used in the TV show *Work In Progress*. Are there any other shows or movies that would be a dream for you to have your music in?

"Oh yeah, [production company] A24 abso-fucking-lutely. The whole mood they give off and the stuff they make goes really well with what I do. The only thing I don't like of theirs is the term 'elevated horror'; it kinda reminds me of 'intelligent dance music' which... you know, dance music is dance music, why does it have to be intelligent? But, A24, I'm a big fan, and if they approached me I'd clear my whole fucking schedule."

We know you're a big horror fan. What's the all-time greatest horror movie?

"*The Blair Witch Project*! No contest, it's incredible. Just the simpleness of it... the thing that I hate the most in horror movies is the build-up to this antagonist and you see it and all of your expectations are crushed. 'That's not that scary!' But *Blair Witch* never needed that – no bells and whistles, cheap VHS camera, authentic reactions... that's all they needed." **H**

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